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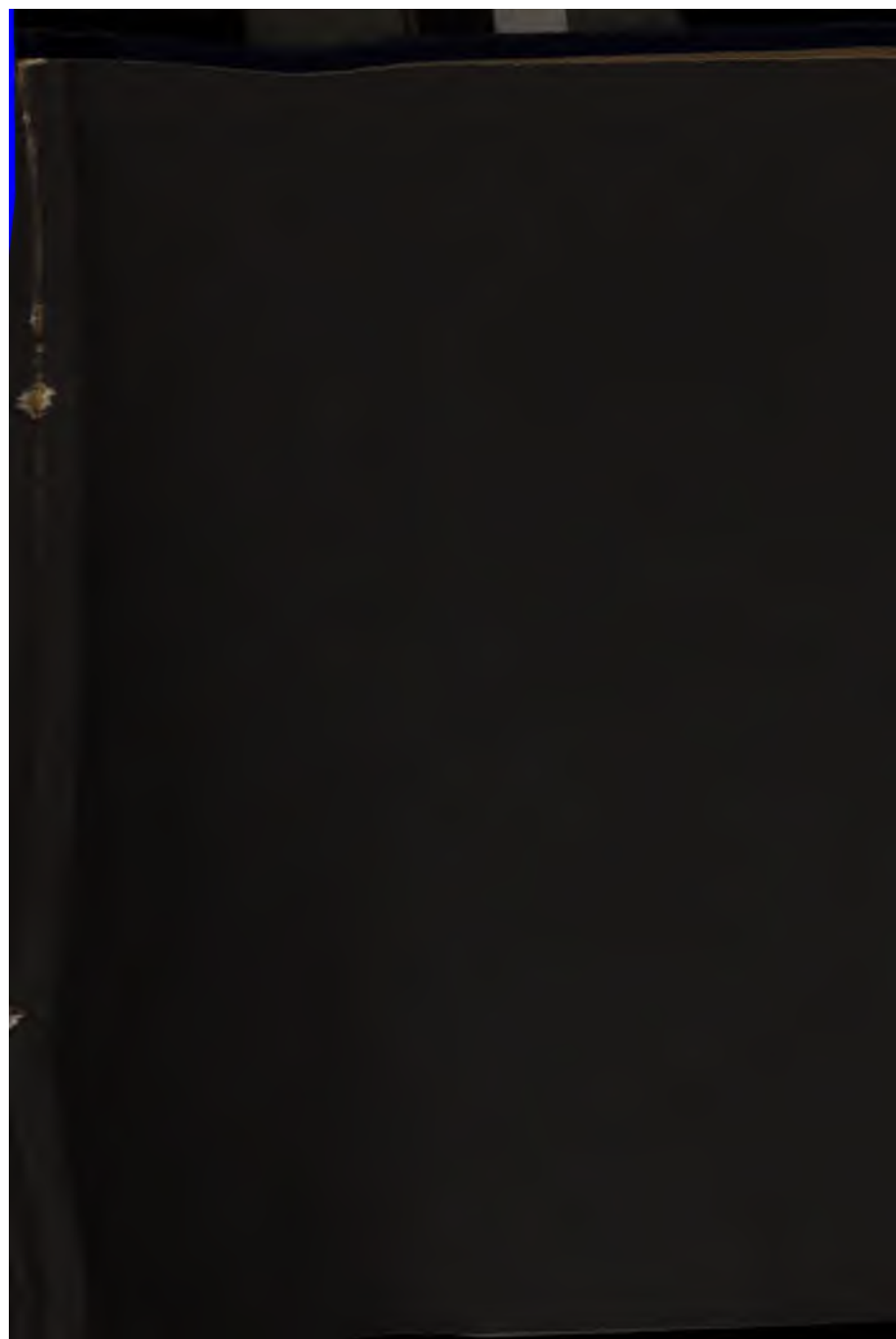
ANDREW HARVEYS
WIFE



L. T. MEADE



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"Happy dreams were visiting her."—Page 11.

ANDREW HARVEY'S WIFE

BY

L. T. MEADE

AUTHOR OF "A DWELLER IN TENTS," "MOU-SETSÉ,"
"SCAMP AND I," ETC., ETC.



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ANDREW HARVEY'S WIFE.



CHAPTER I.

UNDER A LAMP-POST.

CERTAINLY the night was a wretched one; rain fell, not in clean, refreshing showers, but in a cold, drizzling mist. Accompanying the mist was a fog—a London fog. The hour was eight o'clock, the month November. Such being the night, those who were out in it, exposed to its discomforts, had a certain right to the misery they wore in their faces. Thinly clad women looked a shade thinner than usual; pale faces, as they were reflected in the gas-lamps, appeared ghastly; oaths and foul language, coming in muffled tones through the fog, sounded horrible, and the bitter cry of pain and want rang cruelly through the night air. But there are circumstances when even a London fog will not depress, and there are moments when the sun (metaphorically speaking) will shine, even though the hour be a late evening hour and the month November.

Yes, the night was a wretched one; but there were two people out in it, quite impervious to its miseries.

A man and a woman stood under a lamp-post, at the corner of a long, quiet street. The place where they stood was nearly deserted, and the fog settled round them gloomily; but they noticed neither the gloom nor the stillness; they stood under one umbrella, and the man held the woman's left hand very firmly in his right. As I said the sun of happiness will shine, whatever the state of the weather, and it was blessing this pair now with a thousand glittering rays. The two faces, the one looking up, the other down, were young, handsome, radiant.

"It is all settled, then, Hester," said the man, "and I will call to-morrow night."

"Yes," she answered.

"Good night; farewell till then," he said, not kissing her, but pressing the hand he still held a trifle more firmly; then they parted, he hurrying Citywards, she hastening down the humble street where was her home.





CHAPTER II.

THE CHILDREN'S HOUR.

THE house No. 18, Varley Street, was a noisy one. It was also gloomy, untidy—shall I say it?—not too scrupulously clean. It was eight o'clock—eight o'clock on a November evening—and the inmates of No. 18, Varley Street, were at home. They were at home with two exceptions. The father had not yet returned from his place of employment as City clerk, nor had the eldest daughter come in. But the mother and the nine younger children were at home—consequently No. 18, Varley Street, was noisy. In the back parlour, a heterogeneous meal of dinner and supper combined, was going on, and this meal was usually a quarrelsome one. Boys and girls crowded round an untidy table, talking, laughing, shouting, disputing, some of the younger ones even weeping. There were four boys and five girls, varying in ages from seventeen to five. The group was presided over by a pale, sickly woman—a woman whom hard times, money cares, sundry and manifold troubles of life had robbed of her roses, and sown in their stead the noxious weeds of discontent on the face and in the heart.

“There's been no end of a row in the City, mother—a fire, or something!” said the eldest boy as he helped himself to what was left of the raspberry jam.

"I say, mother, Jim's pinching me," sobbed Sophy, a flaxen-haired girl of nine.

"And, mother," said a third—a handsome lad with bright eyes—"I will not wear this shabby old jacket any more, to be taunted by the fellows as 'Charity School-boy,' and 'Crosspatch,' and such names. So here goes." And he tossed the offending garment to the other end of the room, sending his heavy dirty boots after it.

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Morgan. "Harold, you know I can't do better for you. Sophy, stop sobbing, do. Jim, leave her alone. Now, Rupert"—turning to the eldest and quietest of the group—"tell us about the fire. Children, listen to Rupert."

In the midst of Rupert's recital there came a ring to the front door—a ring neither impatient nor timid; a quiet, comfortable, reassuring ring, a ring which seemed to say, "Now I, Order, am about to restore peace."

The moment the mother heard the ring she sat down and poured herself out a cup of tea, drinking it quietly, and much of the discontent which marred her face leaving it. The younger children smiled, looked at each other, whispered, "Here's Hetty," and endeavoured to listen to their brother's narrative. Five minutes later and the object of all this quieting influence, in the shape of a blooming girl of nineteen, entered the room—a tall girl, with golden hair, fair face, and soft brown eyes; upright as a dart and neat from her white collar to her dainty boots, she presented a perfect contrast to the group, who welcomed her with eager words, smiles, and caresses.

"I am sorry I am late, mother," she said; then she kissed the youngest child, patted the cheek of a handsome little fellow of ten, and taking Mrs. Morgan's place at the tea-tray, helped the impatient boys and

girls in so efficient a manner, that their eager appetites were quickly satisfied.

As her deft fingers moved noiselessly among the cups and saucers, and her busy lips chatted about a thousand merry nothings, neither the mother, nor the children, who hung on her words, noticed the new, sweet gleam of half-startled joy which shone in her downcast eyes; they only saw that Hetty's cheeks were a little brighter than usual to night, and they only felt that No. 18, Varley Street, was a very bearable place when Hetty was at home.

After tea came multitudinous duties; the tea-things were washed and put away (for this part of the household economy was never left to the solitary household drudge), the untidy parlour was reduced to something like order, the hearth swept, the fire made bright, then a circle was formed round it, chairs and stools were brought promiscuously forward, silence reigned, happiness beamed on each young face, even the mother ceased to look careworn. The reason for this was manifest, the children's hour had arrived.

Every Saturday night, as long as these unruly and in many respects ill-brought-up children could remember, they had an hour, an hour devoted to them, in which a story, a fable, a fairy tale, an adventure was related—new, startling, interesting—bringing with it unalloyed bliss.

This hour dated back to some remote regions, when 18, Varley Street, was not their home, when the mother's brow was white and unfurrowed, and the father, who was not present to-night, presided over the tale, and caused the laugh to ring round.

These days, when the Morgans were rich and care had not visited them, were remembered by the elder children and talked of by the younger. These days had vanished, but the hour, the children's hour, coming

once a week, had remained a fixed institution, the story-tellers having alone changed places.

The father, whose tales had all been of pixies and sea-kings, of naval adventures and piratical exploits, had resigned his office to the mother. The father had indeed vanished from the group, and Mrs. Morgan, who, for a year or two, had entertained her children with gentle tales of a melancholy tendency, religious cast, and obvious moral, had long since resigned the presidential chair to Hester.

Hester, who was bright and clever, could tell a story well. She could enable her little hearers to feel the moral, to drink in the good conveyed, without bringing either obtrusively forward.

Hester could tell a story without any moral whatever. She could recite a ballad, or rattle off a racy, jolly tale, which would send these children to bed uproarious with mirth and radiant with delight. She had tact, and chose her stories with skill, adapting her tales to the very irregular moods and tempers of her young auditors.

Thus, when the Morgans were quarrelsome, noisy, and openly defiant, she chose stories of a pathetic tendency; she appealed to their higher natures, touched with skilful fingers the chords of right and noble feeling, seldom without some result; but when, on the other hand, life looked gloomy before their young eyes, when the cares of poverty, and the atmosphere of Varley Street, and the world of Varley Street, hemmed them in, she carried them away to bright and joyous scenes; she had a vivid imagination, and she could tell of places she had never visited, of sunsets her eyes had never seen, of rose-tipped waves, of tropical worlds. She could people these worlds with fairies; and what child does not grow young and childlike and happy, listening to a fairy tale!

To-night the boys and girls pressed round the favourite sister, and eager words of—"Well!" "Let's begin!" "Give us a rattling good one to-night, Het!" sounded on all sides.

"I will tell you to-night," said Hester, raising her eyes, looking round the group, and speaking in a demure, quiet voice, "I will tell you to-night the exciting, the thrilling, the altogether noble adventures of"—here she paused.

"Oh, what!"

"Oh, say!"

"Hetty, you are cruel to keep us in suspense," burst from a chorus of children.

"I will tell you to-night," continued the young narrator, "the story, thrilling, novel, exciting, the story also full of instruction and edifying reflections—in short, children, boys and girls, I will tell you to-night the story of 'Puss in Boots.'"

A dead pause, a look of consternation, then the children began to expostulate: they knew "Puss in Boots" so well; they did not want moral stories; they were sick of edifying reflections; would not their own Hetty tell them something fresh; would she not, like the dear darling she was, tell them something really new, and really exciting? No, Hetty was obdurate, and the young Morgans felt to-night that they were done. And yet as they listened they began to perceive—dimly, it is true, and in an undefined way—that it was not quite to the old nursery fable they were asked to lend attentive ears. The story was the same, the ogre was just as ogreish, and puss, brave puss, just as noble as ever, just as piteous when she begged of her master not to eat her, just as heroic in her efforts to save him. So well did Hester speak of that cat, and that cat's adventures, that in spite of themselves the young Morgans grew interested, grew enthusiastic, and

when the story came to an end they all exclaimed with one voice, that after all "Puss in Boots" was one of the best and dearest old stories in the world.

"But where's the moral?" asked Rupert.

"There is none," answered Hester, "unless—unless"—here she paused—"oh, 'tis nothing, children, there's no moral, only I'm glad 'Puss in Boots' was not killed."

"I should think so; what would her master have done without her?" from all the children. Other and eager remarks were crowding to the tips of their tongues, when something occurred which nearly took their breaths away.

Hester grew very red, bit her lips, winked her eyelashes, finally pressing her handkerchief to her face, she ran out of the room. The fact was, Hester had burst into tears.

* * * * *

"Rupert," said Harold that night, as he took off his jacket and prepared to tumble into bed, in the attic which the four boys occupied, "why did Hetty cry this evening?"

Rupert rubbed his face, stared hard, and said, "I don't know."

"And why did she tell us 'Puss in Boots'?"

"How can I tell?" from the elder brother, this time a little crossly. "I think it was rather a sell telling us that old thing."

Rupert was nearly asleep when Harold's voice sounded again, this time clear and excited.

"I say, Rupert, and Johnnie, and Charlie, I've been thinking—I've—I've thought of something."

"I wish you would not disturb a fellow," growled the elder brother.

"What! do say!" from the little brothers.

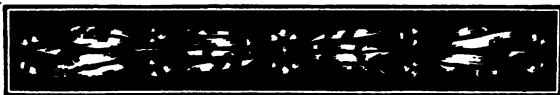
"Why, Hester is our 'Puss in Boots.'"

The little brothers were very much astonished ;
Rupert said nothing.

Finally, from Johnny and Charlie—" Hetty's a real
duck—perhaps she is ' Puss in Boots. ' "

Rupert lay awake for an hour.





CHAPTER III.

JOHN MORGAN.

THAT same night, when the Morgan boys and girls were asleep, and the noisy house had sunk into the quiet which it never knew in its waking moments, a tall man, wrapped in a shabby great-coat and rather dirty muffler, might have been seen standing on the steps of No. 18.

This man was the missing link in the family circle : in short, he was the story-teller who had vanished from the children's hour. He had a latch-key in his hand, but he did not immediately apply it to the lock ; on the contrary, he turned his back to the door, and gazed up and down the street.

There was nothing of either inquisitiveness or expectation in his gaze ; his whole attitude, the look in his eyes, the very way he shuffled his uncertain feet, showed a want of interest, the want of interest of one who had a very slight hold of hope.

The clock in a neighbouring church-tower struck twelve. He listened until the last stroke had died away, then roused himself, rubbed his cold hands—for as he stood on the steps he shivered not a little—and let himself into the house. He shut the door softly, and found himself in complete darkness. This fact, however, failed to take him by surprise ; for economic

reasons the hall lamp had been put out full two hours ago. He knew where to find the matches, applied one to a candle which had been placed in readiness, and holding it in his still numb fingers, went into the parlour.

The parlour presented a contrast to the hall. The hall was dark and cold, the parlour warm, warm with the cheery radiance of a bright fire. On the fire was a saucepan, the contents of which bubbled and emitted a savoury smell. An arm-chair was drawn up to the hearth, a little table stood near, on the table was a tray containing cup and saucer, spoon and plate.

Just the ghost of a smile of satisfaction flitted across the man's face as he noticed these signs of welcome, "That child, again," he said. He came a step nearer, then stood still with a start, and the uncertain smile became certain. The arm-chair drawn up to the hearth was occupied. A young girl lay in it fast asleep; a pretty sleeper, with flushed cheeks and parted lips. Happy dreams were visiting her, for she smiled and uttered a glad word or two. The man looked at her earnestly for half a moment, then he unfastened his great-coat, threw aside his discoloured muffler, and noiselessly and with careful step removed the saucepan from the fire. He poured the hot soup into the cup, and drawing another chair forward, prepared to eat his supper.

As he ate, the light of the solitary candle fell on his face, revealing features that must once have been handsome. The nose was aquiline, the forehead broad and high, the deep-set eyes were brilliant, once they must have emitted fire, and the thinly though finely cut lips have curved in merry lines; but now the man's whole attitude, the colour of the face, the furtive, downward look of the eyes showed that he had passed through some crisis; in short, they showed that the boundary

line between vice and virtue had been crossed. He was not a bad man, but no one who watched him as he sat by his hearth could have proclaimed him altogether respectable. He had the shabby look of one whose ways are uncertain; but joined to the shabbiness, adding pathos to the picture, were lines of suffering, about mouth and around eyes, in the stooping figure and shaking hands, which showed that even while he sinned he repented. "How tired that child must be!" he said once again, half aloud; "but—well, I am glad she is up, I want to speak to her."

He had partaken of his supper in absolute silence, but now he moved his cup and saucer, and shuffled with his feet—he did not like to arouse her roughly, but why did she not wake? At last he touched her arm, then, hesitating as he did so, bent down and kissed her brow. The kiss effected its purpose, the brown eyes opened wide.

"Have I been asleep, father? Have you been in long? And—why, you have eaten your supper!"

"Yes, Hester. Hester, dear, I am glad you are not in bed; put a little more coal on the fire, my love—I am wretchedly chilly."

"Yes, father." She obeyed him, then stood before him and looked into his face. She was evidently nerving herself to some effort; her thoughts were pre-occupied or she would have noticed something that would have arrested her words; as it was she spoke suddenly, though with enforced calmness, "Father, dear, I have got something to tell you; I—I sat up on purpose. Will you give me ten minutes?"

"Something to tell me, Hester?" looking up impatiently. "You have not, I hope you have not left your situation, my dear."

"No." His impatience had aroused her resentment, and she resolved to tantalise him a little.

"Mrs. Claymore has refused to pay you ? 'Tis sure to be a money trouble. Well, go on, child—have it out ; I am tired and sleepy, and I have something to say to you. Go on, Het ; my news is not good either—mine is no fancied grievance, dear. I was glad when I saw you had not gone to bed, for you must break it to the mother for me."

He spoke in that querulous, complaining voice which a weak man will use when he feels that the world is against him, and yet knows in his inmost soul that the world is right in its resentment. His eyes were cast down ; had a stranger watched him then he would have added to his other faults that of selfishness.

"Poor father !" said the girl. She was still pre-occupied, still absorbed with herself, or she would have requested him, as he had hoped and intended she should, to tell his tale first. She knelt down by his side, and looked into his face ; her own young face was strong, and had marks of vigour and decision—a contrast to his.

"When you came in, father, I was dreaming—it was quite a nice dream, but tinged, as dreams always are, somehow, with a trifle of shadow. I thought I was tired ; I had a long day with Mrs. Claymore, and had come home and told the children a story, and mother had a headache, and I did a trifle of mending for her ; then I copied those tiresome papers that always make your eyes ache (by the way, they *are* all copied, father ; I did them to-night, after the children went to bed), then I lay down and went to sleep. I thought you came in, as you really must have come in, and stood close to me and kissed me, and called me your 'comfort.' That was all," continued Hester, stopping and blushing ; "not much, you will say, but I liked it."

The father was so far touched that he put his arm round the daughter's waist. "My dear," he said,

sighing, "your dream is true; you *are* a comfort to me. Your mother—well, never mind; you are not only the comfort that a good woman and daughter must be to any man, but you can give the help which a strong and vigorous mind can afford. You are clever, Hester, and not afraid of emergencies; it is a relief to me to talk to you, for you don't cry or get into hysterics or blame a man. If ever you marry, Hester, don't blame your husband, my dear; no man's affection will be proof against that. And now, is your little dream all you have to say? for if so it was sent to you, I verily believe, as a warning—for, Hester, I need not your comfort only, but your help." He raised his eyes now, gazing at her fully. There was no doubt as to the earnestness of his need, and it smote through the thin veil in which the selfishness of sudden good had wrapped her.

Should she let him tell his story first? But no, her news was bright, and could be quickly communicated.

"Dear father, my dream was not what I had to say; I have news. It is not gloomy, it—it may cheer you; and just at present it does not even take me away. Father dear, you remember Mr. Harvey? He has asked me to be his wife."

These words, spoken very quietly, had an instant effect on the man to whom they were addressed. His indifference vanished; he raised his head with alacrity.

The furtive gleam gone from his eyes, they looked straight and piercingly into the young eyes gazing into his. So completely taken by surprise was he, that he forgot himself; he was intensely interested. Instantly, with those rather trite words, did John Morgan become the man and the father. Looking at Hester, he felt through and through a heart that still struggled after virtue four facts. His child was a child no longer—she was a woman; she was beautiful; she was so dear to

him, John Morgan, that it was agony to think of parting with her.

"My dear," he stammered. He put his arm round her and kissed her; the arm that encircled her waist trembled. He was ashamed of his emotion. He got up and paced the room—once—twice—then sat down prepared to listen; there was no more fear of his thoughts wandering.

"Hetty, you nearly took my breath away. Tell me all about it, my darling. Who is Mr. Harvey?"

"You have heard me speak of him, father—perhaps not very often of late. I have met him at Mrs. Claymore's. I have felt for some time that he liked me, and—and to-day he said so."

"But who is he, child? Is he a gentleman? Is he respectable?"

These words were asked so anxiously, and with such apparent doubt as to the answer they would evoke, that Hester could not help smiling.

"Dear father, you forget where I have made his acquaintance. Mrs. Claymore would not be likely to know any one who was not a gentleman. He is the son of Sir Andrew Harvey, of ——shire. I think he is quite respectable."

Just as great a start as her first words had called forth passed again over the face of John Morgan, but this time it came from a different cause. Again the furtive look returned to the eyes, and again the selfish cunning which dwarfs all fatherhood entered the heart.

He rubbed his hands, poked the fire, then continued, speaking cautiously, "The son of a baronet! Is he the eldest son?"

"He is the only son."

"Of course he is rich?"

"I don't know; I suppose so."

"Hetty, you are a little goose," kissing her.

The man was now in the highest possible spirits.

"So he told you he liked you, and all that sort of nonsense; and you—what did you say to him, my dear?"

"I love him," said Hester, burying her head on her father's shoulder.

"And you can marry at once, of course?"

"No, father. I said 'No' to that. We must not marry for a year at least—perhaps two years—not until Alice is old enough to take my place. I told him all that; how I was wanted at home, and what a help even the little money I earn is to mother. I told him I could not leave home until some one else could earn money for mother, and help with the children. I think he saw what I meant. He does not quite like it, but I believe he will be satisfied."

"What! to wait a year, when he can marry at once?"

"Or perhaps two years," answered Hester.

"But he *must* not, my dear. Hester, you don't surely suppose we could be so selfish? No, no; you must marry the young man when a fit time has elapsed, and wait for no Alice or any such nonsense."

"Then you don't want me so much at home?" said Hester, moving a little away from him, and looking into his face with astonishment.

"Of course we want you, my love; but that is not the point. We must think *for* you now, and for the young man who wants to make you his wife. Your scruples are very nice, my dear, but they are not quite just to him; and he—well, well, Hester, you have taken me by surprise."

"You are not vexed or sorry?"

"Vexed! sorry! No; these are good tidings. I am much pleased—I am proud of you. Sir Andrew

Harvey's son! I know all about Sir Andrew Harvey. My child, you are making a great match."

"Am I?" said Hester.

"You are proud of it?"

"I am very proud of *him*."

"Yes, yes, I know; that is just like a young girl of fine sentiment. Of course you are proud of him, my love; but you will be proud of other things some day. My Hetty will be a great lady—Lady Harvey! Who would have thought it?"

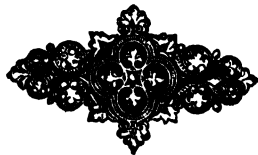
A look of pain flitted across Hester Morgan's face. She got up, and stood by the mantelpiece.

"I am glad you are pleased," she said gravely. "Now I can listen to your news: what is it?"

"My news!—mine! Mine was bad news, but it may be averted. I won't tell it to-night. Hetty, when am I to meet this young man?"

"He has promised to call to-morrow evening."

"Good—to-morrow evening; that is well. Good night, Hetty; God bless you. Dream golden dreams, my darling." Then, as she left the room and he prepared to follow her, he continued, half aloud, half to himself, "To-morrow evening—it may be averted. Sir Andrew Harvey's son my son-in-law!"





CHAPTER IV.

HER OWN PEOPLE.

IT was Sunday evening—Sunday evening at the Morgans'. They were a semi-religious household; that is, they observed the ordinances of religion, without being influenced by its power. Neither father, mother, nor children found religion a comfort; the anxious mother cast none of her care upon it; the high-spirited children, looking forward with passionate longings to life, sought no strength from it. Yet they were considered religious people. They went to church, they attended Sunday-school, they were very orthodox in their theological opinions, they were intolerant to those who differed from them, and all weathers found them in God's house, no matter what the state of their boots or the condition of their umbrellas. Yes; they were religious—considered so by their neighbours, most of all so by themselves—but they were religious with an exception.

The head of the house, with the total want of all heart-worship, had thrown off the outward form. In so far he was honest, though he thought of no honesty or above-board dealings with his Maker when he sat at home and smoked his pipe, instead of accompanying his family to the large old-fashioned church lower down the street.

On this particular Sunday evening all the church-going members of the family were out, and John Morgan sat alone in the little room which he chose to consider his study. He had ordered a fire to be lit here, and he now sat smoking a pipe and gazing into the ruddy embers. He did not look nearly so forlorn as he had done on the previous evening. The fact was, his breast was once more animated by hope, and this fact had brought back the lustre to his eyes, and much of the comeliness to features which had once been handsome. The night before, as he stood on his door-step, looking vacantly up and down the nearly deserted street, despair had almost visited him, dreadful possibilities had floated before his eyes, dark suggestions had come to mock, to tempt, almost to persuade. But now, once again, hope, rose tinted and radiant, sat upon his hearth; and in this blissful company Morgan smoked his pipe and was happy.

That marriage of Hester's—what might it not do for him? He had dreamt of it, thought of it, almost lived on it, for nearly twenty-four hours now. The quiet young girl, whose graceful movements he had watched with so much pride to-day, could not have given her coming marriage more thought than did he. He looked at Hester with new eyes; he was proud of her; he had always believed in her talents, he now believed in her beauty; he thought that he loved her more than ever. This last fact may be doubted, but Morgan's belief in it can scarcely be wondered at. The fact was, Hester's intended marriage had saved him from despair.

Morgan had the vice which accompanies weak but originally generous natures—he could not live within his means. He was also the kind of man whom poverty degrades as well as depresses. As a rich man he might have walked in the outward paths of virtue, as a poor man he must step aside into shadier roads.

I have said that once the Morgan family were prosperous. They had not always lived in Varley Street. They had owned a large house in Bloomsbury, and this house was well appointed, well furnished, well kept. The house had belonged to Morgan's father, who was a wealthy merchant, and when he—John Morgan—young and handsome, had married the pretty daughter of a retail tradesman, it was considered a *mésalliance*, and was a cause of grave offence to the elder Morgans. True, the young wife was ladylike and well educated, but the retail tradesman's daughter was a constant source of annoyance to the proud merchant's family.

"John might have done better," they said. This was true—but the possibility also arose that he might have done worse. He loved his young bride, and but for himself his married life might have turned out well. But Morgan was his own enemy, and under such circumstances who can aid a man, for who can save him from himself?

A year or two after his marriage his father died, and Morgan found himself at the head of a flourishing business; he was, in truth, a very wealthy man.

It would take too long a time, it would be too common-place a story, to tell of the succeeding years. Enough that their path led downwards; wealth decreased, speculations failed, advice of wiser heads was disregarded, debts were incurred, all the vicissitudes of a merchant's life when "his luck," as he expresses it, is against him, were experienced, and at last the well-known firm of "Morgan Brothers," so much respected in the city, was declared to be insolvent. It was not altogether a dishonourable insolvency. When matters were finally arranged the creditors were paid seven shillings in the pound, and declared themselves satisfied. The only one utterly bankrupt was Morgan himself. But the blow had crushed him morally as well as physically.

To a nature like his, poverty must be his destruction, and he found himself the poorest of the poor. Another firm had bought up his father's business, and they offered him a clerkship where before he had been head. He accepted the post, and expressed gratitude for the unusually large salary of two hundred a year—but his spirit was broken. He had been a very jolly, lively fellow, full of fun and with a love for adventure; but now the fun was crushed out of him, and smiles no longer played about his lips.

It was at this time he ceased to tell stories in the children's hour, for, in truth, the pixies and sea-kings had so completely faded from his own life that they could not be repeated in his brain nor on his tongue.

When the crushing calamity which had altered Morgan's life occurred, Hester was ten years old. There were several younger children—handsome and happy children—well cared for and well managed, for Mrs. Morgan had plenty of spirit in the old days. In the old days, too, Morgan had loved her, and she had loved him; they had been a very happy pair, understanding each other well. But adversity, which proved too strong for the husband, was also too strong for the wife. She upbraided him, and he ceased to regard her with affection.

But poverty has its uses, and the rough wind is good for the proper development of flowers and plants. The pretty little girl who had been of no special moment in the rich Bloomsbury mansion, began to hold a place of her own in the poor Varley Street home. The burdens dropped from them by the broken-down father and mother were taken up by the resolute child. She was so healthy, so happy, so gay, that poverty had no alarms for her. She liked to sit by her mother's knee, to prattle by her mother's side, and never regretted the grand nursery,

where she had been shut up often against her will. Without being exactly old-fashioned she was a motherly little body, and she learned to care for the younger children, and even to help to nurse the new babies as they came one by one. She was a very loving child, had a passionate admiration for both father and mother, regarding them both as perfect, and with unconscious tact learning to manage, to soothe, to comfort both.

Unconsciously also they leant upon her, and the relations between these parents and this child were almost from the first reversed.

On two hundred a year it was impossible for Morgan to give Hester much education; and she might have developed into a merely unselfish household drudge, but for a circumstance that occurred about a year after the family had made for themselves a humble home in Varley Street. Hester was a pretty child—in this respect she resembled her mother. Golden-haired and blue-eyed had been the girl whom long ago John Morgan had loved; golden-haired also was the little daughter, sunny her face, bright and clear her complexion; but the blue eyes of the mother were, in the child, brown, dark, and serious, giving the force and character to the face which the mother's had ever lacked. One day the pretty child attracted the notice of a lady who had long ago known her mother, who had in truth bought ribbons and gloves from the mother when she stood behind her father's counter. This lady, wealthy and well connected, had long ago taken a fancy to the fair tradesman's daughter.

Quite certain whose the child must be, by her striking likeness to her mother, she stopped her, questioned her, finally learned her story.

This conversation led to results. Mrs. Claymore went to see Mrs. Morgan. Mrs. Morgan disappointed her,

the broken-down discontented woman failed to create fresh interests, but the brave, spirited child did.

Mrs. Claymore resolved to have nothing more to say to Mrs. Morgan. She considered her mean and low-minded; equally she resolved to help and raise the child. Mrs. Claymore had no children of her own. She offered to adopt Hester, if Hester on her part would give up her parents and regard her as a mother.

Hester threw this offer from her with scorn. Give up her own father and mother, and brothers and sisters! Not for worlds. What did Mrs. Claymore mean? Who was Mrs. Claymore? She hated her. Hester went into a passion at the bare idea, and the next time she met the fine lady she was positively rude to her.

But, strange to say, the high-born woman liked the lowly child none the less for her angry refusal of so magnificent an offer. If Hester would not become her adopted child, she at least would give her an education. She would send her to a first-class daily school, and pay all her quarterly bills.

This proposal was received by father, mother, and child with tears of joy. For seven years Hester went to one of the best London schools; she had masters, she attended classes and lectures. Everything was done to develop an intellect of no mean order. When Hester was eighteen, Mrs. Claymore asked for her reward.

"You are well taught" she said; "you can now earn money as a teacher."

"I know it," answered Hester, "and I must look for a situation at once."

As she spoke she sighed, for she thought of the poverty at home and the many increasing cares.

"You want to help your own people?" said Mrs. Claymore, who heard the scarcely audible sigh.

"Of course I do," said Hester with vehemence; "for what other use was I put into the world?"

Mrs. Claymore smiled: but she liked the enthusiastic creature.

"You are quite right, my love; but you shall keep them in my way, and by so doing you will help me also. I am no longer young, and I want a companion to read to me, and write my letters, and go about with me, and help me in a thousand little ways. Give me your days, Hester—you may spend your nights at home—and I will give you fifty pounds a year.

This offer Hester accepted. By doing so she could accomplish a twofold object; she could assist her father and mother with money, and she could brighten her home with her own sunny presence. Mrs. Claymore proved herself no hard-task-mistress. Had Hester been her adopted child she would have taken her into society, but, as her young companion and amanuensis, she would be guilty of no such breach of etiquette. In consequence Hester's evenings were almost entirely her own; and those evenings she devoted to the Varley Street home. She gave Alice, her next sister, music and French lessons. She helped her mother; she amused her brothers; in short, she did those thousand and one things which an unselfish woman can do to make others happy. She thought of herself as no heroine; it was her heart's delight to draw smiles and caressing words from the dear ones she loved; but surely

The daily round, the common task,

were bringing her, in the poet's words, near to God.

At school Hester had made many friends; but she had done with school—had indeed nearly completed her nineteenth year—before any one had approached those sacred precincts of her heart where she had enshrined her own family. So intense was her affection

for this rough and disorderly household, that she was blind to all their imperfections. She saw no weaknesses in her father, no discontent in her mother, no roughness in Rupert, no vulgarity in Alice—love hid these blemishes; and though love, as it grew in intensity, in experience, must finally have revealed them, yet that time had not yet come for Hester.

Before, however, she was quite nineteen, another claimant demanded the warm, loving heart which had hitherto expended its affections within the family shrine. Hester was too completely a woman not to respond to this claim; she did so with all the fervour of her passionate nature. I have said that Mrs. Claymore did not take her into society; neither to ball nor opera did Mrs. Claymore ask her young companion to accompany her. Still, at this lady's house it was impossible for so beautiful a girl to pass without observation.

Mrs. Claymore was rich; she lived in fashionable society. She dabbled a little, a very little, in literature. It cannot be said that her literature met with marked success; but she went in for art and culture, and young men of fashion, young painters, young authors, young poets, liked to be seen in her rooms.

Her evening assemblies were thronged, but Mrs. Claymore—hospitable and open-handed—liked to see friends at luncheon and five-o'clock tea, and from these gatherings Hester was not excluded.

Mrs. Claymore was fond of her young *protégée*; she would break no rules of etiquette for her sake, but none the less did she like to see her draw forth attention and admiration. Mrs. Claymore hoped that Hester would secure for herself a place in society by a wealthy and high marriage, and Hester seemed likely to fulfil this worthy lady's ambition.

Amongst the most frequent visitors to Sumnor Place was a young man of good birth and high position, the

son of a baronet. Mrs. Claymore welcomed him with open arms. Andrew Harvey had, however, personal claims to respect and esteem which he owed to no mere accident of birth.

A barrister by profession, but with plenty of money, he dabbled more in literature than in the law; he wrote articles for the leading journals; he was looked up to as a man of no ordinary promise, and brilliant predictions were uttered for his future.

He was ambitious, and he liked the gay nod of an approving world.

But joined to his intellectual powers, this man had some heart qualities—rare nowadays—which taught him to esteem, and to seek to win, a certain good gift which he believed Providence to have placed in his way.

Hester's position did not hinder him from seeking to obtain her love; he admired her beauty, he quickly read the simple story of her noble nature.

So ardent, so enthusiastic, so innocent a creature must make a perfect wife; or if the hitherto untrained life needed some further training, how delightful to accomplish it with his own hands; untrammelled as yet by the fetters of society, how gracefully she would wear those fetters by-and-by! So for months Andrew Harvey visited Sumnor Place, looked at Hester, talked to her, drew forth shy responses, not from the lips alone, but from the heart; then when he had watched her colour come and go, seen her eyes grow luminous and dark, felt her hand tremble in his, when, in short, he knew that he had taken captive the whole nature, when he was sure beyond all doubt that he, Andrew Harvey, had stepped into a shrine more sacred than the family shrine—he spoke. He loved her intensely; his words were few and strong, but her love was deep enough to respond to them. So her answer came almost in a monosyllable, but it satisfied him.

Neither of these young people, on the night on which they had lifted the veil and seen each other's inmost hearts, had thought of the outward position of the other, but friends and onlookers were not so unworldly. Mrs. Claymore knew well when she saw Hester and Andrew leave her house together what words would be spoken between them. She was a little pleased, a little excited, a little anxious. *She* could be by no means oblivious to the worldly advantage that from this marriage would accrue to her favourite—but, young Harvey! would his people be equally pleased? Would the fact of Hester's beauty, grace, and noble heart, cover over the graver fact that she was not a lady by birth, and—well—that her father was scarcely respectable? These reflections made Mrs. Claymore a little anxious; but her conscience felt at rest—she had never thrown Hester in Andrew Harvey's way, and whatever the consequences, she was not answerable for them. On the whole then she was pleased; it was a new interest and excitement in her life, and she was sincerely attached to Hester.

Another also was made happy by the worldly side of this engagement. That other, I need not say, was John Morgan.

When, the night before, Hester told her father of the new love which had come into her life—something in the tone, something in the look of the earnest eyes, had stirred the best part of the broken-down man.

The father in him awoke, the good in him came to the surface, his interest was aroused, and self, with its low instincts, was forgotten.

But as Hester continued her story, as she told of the name, of the position of her lover, the good died out of John Morgan, was killed indeed by a fiercer flame. The name of Sir Andrew Harvey was not unknown to

this man ; it came to him as the echo of a long past time, of nearly forgotten recollections.

The old baronet had known Morgan's father, had been proud to his father, and once, when they had met, very distant to him. He fancied his rage when he learned what bride his son had chosen. Imagining the scene between Sir Andrew Harvey and his son, John Morgan felt much satisfaction. But as he sat in his study, on this Sunday evening, he had other thoughts of pleasure in connection with Hester's marriage.

From the ashes of his father's old firm had arisen a new and thriving mercantile business. In the present firm Morgan was, as I have said, a subordinate ; he was a clerk on a salary of two hundred a year. It was scarcely probable, it was indeed contrary to the ways of nature, that the improvident partner should become the trusted clerk. Morgan was careless, unpunctual, inexact ; he made mistakes in the accounts, he was constantly reprimanded for neglect of business. But for a certain compassion which was felt for him, and a certain remembrance of the old days when he had been head of the house, he would long ago have received his dismissal.

But compassion and memory have their limits, and on the very afternoon of the day on which Hester told him of her engagement, he had, for some glaring act of disobedience and neglect, been told by the heads of the firm that his services were no longer required by them. In short he was thrown penniless on the world.

This fact took him by surprise, and reduced him to despair. He had never believed in those oft-repeated threats. His dismissal came on him with all the effects of a sudden blow.

He came home resolved to tell Hester of his trouble, to throw the burden on the strong young shoulders which he felt were capable of bearing it, and then—but

he had no thought beyond; beyond the fact that Hester must share his trouble, all was utter darkness.

Hester, however, with the egotism of personal happiness, had told her news first, and her news had inspired him with hope, had, in short, shown him a loophole out of his difficulty.

This was the loophole. Sir Andrew Harvey was a sleeping partner in the firm for which he worked. Surely the great man would now use his influence to save him from dismissal. He would promise more attention in the future; having been burnt at last by the fire of his own improvidence, he would avoid that fire in the time to come. Oh, yes; the son should plead with the father, the father would do his best, and he, John Morgan, would be saved from ruin and beggary.

This was one of the first of the many good things he promised to himself from Hester's marriage.

No wonder, as he smoked his pipe on this Sunday evening, he should smile many smiles of self-congratulation. Fleeting had been his moments of fatherly love, but lasting, growing stronger moment by moment, were the golden dreams which centred round himself.

Through this connection he might rise step by step to position, to wealth, to the old days which now that they were gone seemed so luminous.

There came a ring at the front door, the sharp, firm ring of a young hand. Morgan started nervously, he felt face to face with his own fate, not Hester's.

The next moment, a young man of aristocratic appearance and noble presence was ushered into the room.





CHAPTER V.

WHAT HARVEY THOUGHT OF HESTER'S PEOPLE.

SOME two hours before Andrew Harvey rang for admittance at John Morgan's door, two young men lounged over a fire in a luxuriously furnished room in Jermyn Street. A bachelor's room evidently, but furnished with some taste and care; choice books lay about, and one or two good engravings and several photographs decorated the walls. The young men sat and smoked their pipes in silence; they were both lost in thought. For half an hour they sat without speaking; then the youngest and jolliest of the two knocked the ashes out of his pipe, stared at his companion, said,—

“Well, Harvey,” and burst out laughing.

“Do I look very amusing?” asked the elder man, with the faintest tinge of annoyance in his tone.

“My dear fellow, you look sentimental! and—pardon me, I can't help it, Harvey—I know all about it; 'tis satisfactorily settled; she has accepted you, old fellow?”

Harvey threw down his pipe.

“She has,” he replied gravely.

This very quiet answer seemed to take the other man by surprise; he turned away, whistled, broke out into his favourite expression of “By Jove!” and walked to the window. It was quite evident by the look on his

sarcastic but pleasant face that he considered his companion a fool. He had not believed his own words when he spoke to Harvey; consequently Harvey's affirmative answer nearly took his breath away; he had meant nothing but some innocent chaff, and lo, and behold, how serious was the state of affairs! He considered his friend in a bad way; he felt both annoyance and disappointment.

For ten minutes this very cheerful but worldly minded young man stood with his face to the window, thinking over his friend's case. The pros and the cons rose before him; but the pros were few, the cons many. It seemed to Charley Staunton that Harvey had disgraced himself, that Harvey had been entrapped. He was just the clever, high-minded fellow to have high-flown ideas about things. There was nothing in his flirting with pretty Miss Morgan; but this—this was a very different step. Charley Staunton thanked his stars that *he* had more common sense and wisdom, and he pitied Harvey, for he believed he had got himself into a scrape. He wondered, ought he, as his chosen and confidential friend, to help him at this pinch? He felt his position to be a difficult one, for he believed that his simple duty was at least to open Harvey's eyes. Awful visions of the old baronet's anger rose before him, of the commotion in the aristocratic circle in which they moved, of his friend being led blindfold to the altar, sacrificed to a fleeting fancy and to false and utterly romantic ideas of unworldly honour. Staunton felt that he ought to interfere; but it was no easy task. He felt instinctively that in his present mood Harvey would be as difficult to manage as a bear with a sore head. He did not like to confess it, but he had a wholesome dread of a man some years older, many hundred degrees cleverer, and not a few inches taller than himself. "Nothing venture, however, nothing have."

Staunton approached the fireside. "Harvey," he began. Harvey had forgotten all about him, had refilled his pipe, and was lost in some other world, into which Staunton had obtained no passport of admittance. "Harvey," said the young fellow again, "I am awfully astonished, you know—and—and—of course I am glad, if you are; the fact is, Harvey, I don't know how to put it—but—but—I am awkward—but—I wanted to say—you won't take it amiss, old fellow—but I wanted to say"—

"Well?" said Harvey.

"Well, you know, Harvey, I am awfully astonished, and—I wanted to say"—

"I know," said Harvey, removing the pipe from his mouth, and looking tranquilly at his companion, "I know all you have got on your mind, and can't get out. You consider Miss Morgan beneath me—a low match, and such stuff. These thoughts are very natural, only they happen to be wrong. She is not beneath me; she is above me."

Staunton's face grew crimson; his favourite exclamation of "By Jove!" again passed his lips. He felt his position to be a horrible one; but having bearded the lion in his den, he must proceed.

"Oh, dear me! Yes, old fellow, I know all that. I know she's delightful—and good—and an angel—and you are as unworldly as—I say—I'm not good at metaphors. But, I say, Harvey, think of her family! Her father's an awful low, seedy kind of fellow—quite a cad in fact—and he'll sponge on you to any extent, and there are a whole tribe of brothers and sisters. I say, Harvey, 'tis perfectly awful—if the girl"—

Harvey's face had grown a little white.

"Leave out about the girl," he said, rising, "I will discuss her with no one—and—I don't marry the family. I'm going out, Staunton. Good day. You will look in to-morrow?"



"I will discuss her with no one."

When Harvey got into the street he pulled out his watch and saw that he had an hour and a half to wait before the time when he must call in at 18, Varley Street. This fact ascertained, he hailed a hansom, and telling the driver to take him to Regent's Park, and drive about till he told him to stop, he resumed the meditations which Staunton's uncongenial words had interrupted. Andrew Harvey was an aristocrat by birth, culture, and inclination. His birth had made him the heir to an old baronetcy. His training at Eton and Christ Church had added that outward refinement which education, carried to its highest point, alone can give. He was also an aristocrat by inclination. This last fact he doubted—this last essential point in his character he was himself unaware of. Secured in his position by all the mighty chains of birth and training, he affected to despise it. He went in for democracy, he went in for the rights of the people. Had he been an Irishman he would probably have been a Home Ruler; being an Englishman, he was a Liberal of the Liberals; in religious opinions the broadest of the broad. In all this he knew nothing of his own heart, and read not as yet its true story aright. He was still some years under thirty, and his was the zeal of untamed youth. He had very decided talents; he had also some of the gifts of an orator; a rich, impassioned voice, and a ready flow of eloquent words; he could now and then even deal in stinging sarcasm and well-aimed and vehement derision. His dream was, some day to get into the House, and meanwhile he expended his talents in pungent and clever articles for the leading journals. His papers were read, were admired. He wrote for the people, and earnest, powerful, bitter were his appeals in their behalf. Friends and foes alike read, admired, and said how vivid and real was young Harvey's knowledge of the masses who lay beneath him.

Those who uttered such words of flattery were vastly mistaken. In truth, this high-flown and visionary young enthusiast knew nothing of those for whose cause he pleaded. Had his eyes really been opened, such a nature as his must have recoiled; one sight of the real coarseness must have appalled him, one vision of the meanness of very low life must have caused him to turn away in disgust. The sin and misery, deprived of all those softening tints which distance bestows, could have touched no chord in his being. Harvey was no true philanthropist, no seeker after God in the lowest places or amongst the most depraved types of humanity. Though he knew it and believed it not, he was too essentially an aristocrat by inclination.

Strange as it may seem, the first awakening of his true self in this man came with Staunton's words. He did not like what Staunton had said about Hester's family; while affecting to despise it, it had, in truth, struck an unpleasant chord in his heart. His love for Hester was very true and very deep; he recognised in her that aristocracy of nature which springs from no birth and is checked by no circumstance. He rejoiced in the fact that this beautiful young creature had nothing to give him but herself! neither name, nor position, nor money; nothing but a face and form of great beauty, a mind of high capacities, and a heart, pure, fresh, noble. His prize was perfect; a gem without a flaw. But—her family! He had heard something of Morgan's previous story, and that something had not commended itself to his approval. He thought of it all over again as he drove through the winter desolation of Regent's Park. As he thought he resolved; it was good to make resolves early. He would wean Hester as much as possible from the family who were unworthy of her, and he would show his undesirable father-in-law very plainly that he could expect no help from him.



CHAPTER VI.

SIR ANDREW HARVEY.

BUT the most easily and firmly made resolves are often the most difficult to carry into execution. This Harvey found to his cost.

The clever but inexperienced man of six-and-twenty found himself, at least at first, no match for the astute and worldly wisdom of the man of fifty. After his interview with Morgan, Harvey went away annoyed, more than ever assured of the wisdom of Staunton's words, but for all that defeated. He had said to himself that he would take a firm stand—that he would, from the very first, show Morgan his true position, and assure the low and vulgar man that he must take no liberties with him, the proud son of a proud race. He wanted Hester, not Hester's father. He found, however, his task no easy one; before her marriage, at least, it was impossible to separate Hester from her father; their interests were identical; he could not refuse to aid one without pain to the other. This Morgan knew, and he used his power well.

Nothing could have been more repellant to Harvey's nature than to plead under existing circumstances for Morgan with his father; nevertheless, he promised to do so, and having made this promise, and being assured in return by Morgan, with tears in his eyes, that he might

have Hester, and her father's blessing with her, whenever he chose to claim her, he went away. His interview was unsatisfactory, showing him, indeed, the thorn beneath the hitherto perfect rose. Hester's father was worse than he had expected; not only his aristocratic bringing up, but the honourable feelings of an honourable gentleman rose in revolt against him. He wondered how Hester could tolerate such a man; and certainly, from the very first, her affection for her father was incomprehensible to her lover.

For an hour or so he felt melancholy, not regretting his choice of Hester, but certainly murmuring over some of the circumstances which surrounded her. At the end of that time, however, he cheered up. After all, he married Hester, not her family. When she was married she would belong to him wholly, and would have nothing more to say to those vulgar people, whom he failed to recognise as fibres of her heart—as parts and parcel of her being. The only thing now to do was to hasten their marriage—to bring about quickly the hour when she should cease to be a Morgan. For this purpose, he went down early the next day to the old home where Sir Andrew Harvey lived.

He must break the news to his father. He knew well that here he would have difficulty, but here, also, being sure of his ground, he trod without fear. His father might chafe, might rage, might even storm; he might pour upon him showers of angry and vindictive words, but in the end he knew he would yield, for he knew that the old man loved him too well to oppose him where his heart's real happiness was concerned.

There were cogent reasons for this love, which would make the old aristocrat sacrifice even position for his son's sake. He was seventy, and this fine stalwart man of six-and-twenty was his only child, his only remaining child—the last, indeed, of the old race. Years back

this had not been so ; years ago six handsome lads had made life in the house and played in the old gardens. Three had died in childhood ; three in early manhood. In his middle age Sir Andrew found himself childless, and very soon afterwards his broken-down wife, the wife of his youth and his first love, followed her sons to another world. He married again. He did not love his second wife—he tolerated her ; nor did he grieve overmuch when she died at the birth of Andrew. But the child she left behind her, the son of his old age, the heir to his old name, he idolised. None of those first bright boys had called forth the love which the second Andrew possessed. All his life long he had denied him nothing. The boy was truly noble, otherwise such indulgence must have ruined him.

Sir Andrew was a stern old man, rather dreaded by those beneath him, but never in all his life had he spoken a hard word to his boy. Nevertheless, as Andrew approached the old demesne to-day, he knew that angry words would be spoken. He was closeted for two hours with the old man. At the end of that time he left the library, walked straight to the stables, mounted his horse without even asking the groom to assist him, and rode away, his fast unbroken for the first time in the home of his ancestors.

Luncheon cooled in the old dining-room. Sir Andrew remained locked up in his study. At six o'clock the butler announced dinner ; he knocked respectfully at his master's door ; his master stormed at him and sent him away. The dinner also remained untasted. The servants whispered together and wondered.

At ten o'clock that night Sir Andrew unlocked his door and came out. He was a tall man, not unlike his son. Though seventy years of age, his carriage was erect, his hair was silvery white, his eyes dark and piercing. He had a deep voice, which no one cared to trifle with.

"Writing materials and a special messenger," he thundered. "A man on horseback. I want to catch the night mail." Then he drank off some brandy; and, sitting down by the dining-table, where the untasted dinner still remained, he wrote a few lines in a firm hand.

The following morning Andrew Harvey found a letter, sealed with the family coat-of-arms, on his table. He broke the seal and read as follows:—

DEAR BOY,—I was mad to-day. Forgive the old man. I can't come to the wedding—I can't meet that abominable family. Forgive me, Andrew, they're an odious lot! How you got into their clutches, for the life of me, I can't conceive. I inclose a cheque. Buy a ring for the girl. You may bring her here for a week, if you like, after the wedding tour.

Your affectionate Father,

ANDREW HARVEY.

P.S.—Tell me nothing about the wedding—I can't stand it. As far as money is concerned, you shall have all that is necessary.

When Andrew read this letter his eyes grew very bright—even a trifle moist. He took up a sheet of paper and wrote as follows:—

DEAREST FATHER,—God bless you!

Your affectionate Son,

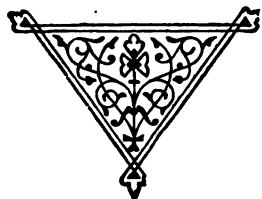
ANDREW HARVEY.

After this, preparations, the few simple preparations which Hester considered necessary, were made, and the wedding-day was fixed for an early date.

Andrew took a small but pretty house near Hyde Park, and the furnishing of this house Mrs. Claymore agreed to superintend.

Hester was to be married from her father's house. Mrs. Claymore had, indeed, proposed that the wedding should take place from hers, but Hester's eyes had flashed so brightly, even at the mere suggestion, that the worthy lady had not ventured to hint at it a second

time. The wedding, however, was to be quiet—no gathering of the Morgan relations; no gay wedding breakfast. The young bride was to be decked in no bridal finery. She was to be married in her travelling-dress, and go away from the church. This Harvey had insisted upon. It was the first time he had laid down the law with success in the Morgan household.





CHAPTER VII.

HESTER'S CASTLE IN THE AIR.

JOHN MORGAN was satisfied ; he felt his position to be good, and hope had returned to him. Very powerful influence being brought to bear on the firm of Dalton and Danby Brothers, they had agreed to retain Morgan as their clerk, Morgan promising reformation, and really meaning it this time. For the first moment in his life he had been brought face to face with absolute ruin ; the prospect had frightened him ; for the time he was really penitent. In proportion was he joyful. This was the first of the many good things which Hester's marriage must bring to him. His mind was of that somewhat coarse fibre which can easily become vulgar ; he was vulgar in his demonstrations of delight now ; he strutted about, and talked boastfully, making much to his fellow-clerks of Hetty's great match, and still more of his own future prospects.

The night before the wedding drew on, and, the father excepted, there was sorrow in the Morgan household. For the first time the children realised that the flower of the flock, the bright, brave young sister, was going to leave them. Until to-night they had seen no sorrowful side to the picture ; they could think and talk of nothing but Hetty's new home, Hetty's grand husband—who inspired them with no little wholesome awe—and all the

beautiful dresses and presents that were crowding in for Hetty. The past six weeks had been weeks of unmitigated delight to these vulgar, but natural people. Now, however, they realised that the end of all this joy must be parting. They did not want to say good-bye to Hetty, and testified the grief which suddenly oppressed them in many and different fashions.

"I begin to hate that Andrew Harvey," said Rupert, in a pompous voice, as he turned the key in the large travelling trunk which Hester was to take away with her to-morrow. "I hear he's no end of a snob. And when I met him yesterday in Regent Street, and turned to walk with him, he was so beastly cool. 'Tis my belief he doesn't mean us to see much more of our Hetty, and I for one don't intend to put up with it. When he marries Hetty, he's my brother-in-law, and he shall find out what that means, I can tell him. What does he intend by his airs? Nearly cutting me before Davis yesterday! I wish to goodness Hetty wasn't going to marry the fellow."

These remarks were addressed with great vehemence to Alice, a flaxen-haired, blue-eyed maiden of sixteen, who stared up at her big brother with round, wondering eyes.

"I'm very glad Hetty is going to be a fine lady," she said. "I mean to be constantly at her house. She said I should come often, and I mean to half live there. She'll give me lots of nice dresses, and ribbons, and such things; and I shall see company. I shall like it immensely; and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if I made as good a match as Hetty any day."

Rupert burst into a loud, mocking laugh.

"You! you ugly, conceited minx. Well, I never! that is too good a joke. I say Harry, and Walter, did you hear what Alice has said? She expects to make as good a match as Hetty; isn't it a joke?"

Harry and Walter, twins of ten, gazed tranquilly at the crestfallen Alice.

"She isn't as pretty," said Harry.

"Nor as nice," said Walter.

Alice grew very black and sulky, and was about to leave the room when the young bride elect came in.

"Rupert, you are a darling. Is my trunk all packed and locked? How nice! Alice, mother says we may have a fire in our room to-night, as 'tis for the last time."

She kissed Rupert, and laid her hand on Alice's shoulder. Rupert smiled; and at the prospect of a fire and a long confidential chat, Alice's sulkiness vanished.

"I'll run and light it," she said, and she left the room.

"Supper is quite ready," continued Hester. "And after supper I mean to tell everybody a story."

"A story?" exclaimed little Maude, the youngest of the group, a tiny child of five. "A story, Hetty! but 't isn't Saturday night."

"You little goose!" said Harry. "She won't be here on Saturday night."

Hetty's face flushed. She bent down and buried her head in the dimpled neck of her little sister.

The last of the children's hours had gone by; for the last time every one of the household group, even the father, had gathered round the family hearth—had listened to Hetty's story—had drunk Hetty's health. And now the children were in bed; that large and ill-regulated family were sleeping peacefully, for they were tired, and the toils of the day had been manifold. Even Alice, weary of waiting for her sister, had fallen into unbroken slumbers. Then Hester, having put by every untidy thing in the parlour—having performed her duties in Varley Street for the last time—took up her candle, mounted the stairs, and knocked at her mother's





“Mrs. Morgan burst into uncontrollable weeping.”

door. By some unspoken contract the mother and daughter had agreed that their words of parting should be uttered in this quiet midnight hour. In answer to a low summons, Hester turned the handle and went in.

Mrs. Morgan was in a very small room which she termed her dressing-room. A fire was burning in the grate; an old tumble-down sofa was drawn in front of the fire. Mrs. Morgan was seated on the sofa. Her pale face, washed-out eyes, and general appearance of weakness and decay were very manifest as she turned round to greet her daughter.

"Come and sit by me, Hetty," she said.

Hester sat down, drawing close to her mother's side. Mrs. Morgan put her arms round her neck, laid her head on her young shoulder, and burst into feeble, but uncontrollable weeping.

"Hetty, I can't. Hetty, my child—my darling, I'm very weak. I think my heart will break without you."

Hester knew how to manage her mother. She checked none of the words that came pouring from the poor, depressed heart, nor any of the tears that flowed from the dim eyes; but when tears and words had ceased she began to comfort. She used cheering expressions. She did not deny that she had been a blessing to her mother, but she tried to make her mother believe that she could be a greater blessing in future; that moving in a different sphere she could help them all as she had never done hitherto. There are some women, however, who, weak, feeble, thought little of by the world or their nearest of kin, have yet perceptions. Mrs. Morgan was one of these women. She saw, what neither Hester nor Hester's father just then realised, the gulf which to-morrow's ceremony would raise between her and the sunshine of her life. Mothers—all mothers—are unselfish, and even this poor, feeble woman would not hold back her child from what she

believed to be good for the child, though evil for herself. But she must relieve her overcharged heart, and she spoke—

“No, Hetty, you will never be the same in the future. I'll never have you all to myself as I have to-night again—your husband will come between. He is a great, grand man, Hetty; and you are making a great match, and your father is delighted; but 'twill divide us, Hetty—I know it will divide us.”

“It will not,” said Hester, in a proud resolute voice. “Mother, you don't understand Andrew; there is nothing mean about him, mother. How can you believe that I would love a man who could divide me from my own? Oh! you are mistaken utterly.”

Hester spoke with some bitterness—even some passing anger against her mother for doubting the man she idolised. Her passionate words, however, rather cheered than depressed Mrs. Morgan. She dried her eyes, sat upright, and endeavoured to feel more hopeful.

“I don't want to grudge you to him, my child,” she said. “I knew you were far too sweet and lovely to be left long in a poor place like this; and you musn't think that we can't live without you, for we'll try. Your father is very hopeful about the future, and that ought to keep me up, of course.”

“I believe that good days are before my father,” said Hester; “and, indeed, before us all, if only we will keep brave hearts. Much as I love Andrew, I thought of us all when I said I would marry him.”

This speech, uttered with grave lips, and a steadfast look in the dark eyes—this speech, intended to comfort Mrs. Morgan, raised, however, another instinct in her nature.

“My dear,” she said, laying her hand emphatically on her daughter's arm, “you must not think so; 'tis like your unselfishness, Hetty, but I don't believe 'tis

quite right. When I thought of marrying John, long ago, I thought of no one but John, though I know I loved my father and mother. 'Tis only quite right and proper, my love, that your husband should be first; your own family must be nothing in comparison to him. You must do nothing for your family that will vex him, my love."

"I don't think I shall vex him," said Hester smiling. She scarcely comprehended her mother's words then. She understood their meaning well by-and-by. "You must make Alice useful to you, mother," she said, after a pause; "it will do her good. I know nothing ever made me so happy as taking a little off your shoulders. And you will try and not be too anxious, mother; and don't kill yourself with overwork. There is no use in it."

"I don't think there is," sighed Mrs. Morgan. "But, Hetty, whether I work or not 'tis all the same."

"Oh, mother, what do you mean?"

"Why, just this, child: I'm good for nothing. I'm a poor, worn-out woman. I've been worn out for years." She turned her white face to her daughter, raising her dim eyes half appealingly. "Yes, I'm good for nothing," she said again. "I hate myself for it, and yet I can't struggle against it. I'm no use to any one; I can't help your father, nor manage the boys, nor rule the house. 'Twould be better for me to be dead, only I'm afraid to die."

"Mother!" began Hester.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Morgan, "that's the worst of all. I want to die, and yet I'm afraid to die. I want the rest of the grave, and yet I'm afraid of it. Hester, is there hope anywhere?"

"Hope!" answered Hester; "it seems to me there is hope always—everywhere—in everything."

"Tell me of a hope for a worn-out woman, Hetty; a worn-out woman good for nothing."

"There's the hope that religion gives," said Hester; but here, for the first time, her voice was doubtful, for though morality had approved itself to her young vision, yet religion, which takes a higher ground, had not yet reached her heart. In short, the need for religion had not yet come to her. She spoke doubtfully, and her mother felt the doubt in her words.

"I have tried religion," she continued. "People make a great talk about religion, and say it comforts one through everything. There's that verse, '*Come unto me*'—you know it, Hetty—'tis a beautiful verse, but somehow I don't feel it. I'm always tired, and I'd like rest more than anything. I'd like to find some one who'd give me a long, long rest—something like a sound sleep, you know—and who wouldn't mind my being very weak and unworthy. People say that Jesus Christ does that, and I've said the verse over and over, and wished beyond anything He'd do it for me, but he never did—never."

"Let us ask Him to do it now," said Hester, moved by a sudden inspiration.

She took her mother's hand, and the two women—the one so hopeless, the other so brimful of rosy hope and joyful anticipation—knelt down side by side.

No words that man could hear came from the lips of either; they knelt in silence for a minute or two, then rose, kissed each other, and without another word parted.

Never had this mother and daughter been so near, so entirely one; neither knew how completely, in this world, they must henceforth be sundered. But yet, had they not found a meeting-place where man could not divide them?

Hester went up to the small attic which she shared with Alice at the top of the house. The fire, lighted in honour of this last evening, was nearly out, and Alice,

tired of waiting, was fast asleep. The hour was very late—indeed, early morning. Hester undressed quickly, lay down by her young sister, and closed her eyes. She lay still for a few moments, then opened them wide. She found she could not sleep. She was tired, excited, happy, and this threefold condition kept her awake. She resigned herself to golden waking dreams instead of sleeping ones.

The short six weeks of the hurried engagement were nearly over—to-morrow she would be a wife. During these six weeks all had been hurry, excitement, intense joy. She loved the man she was about to marry with her whole heart; her own family, who came next in her affections, were delighted; there seemed no cloud in her sky.

Andrew had not come often to her father's house, but she had met him daily at Mrs. Claymore's, and there she had talked to him of all that was in her heart. It was impossible in these long conversations to avoid all mention of the father and mother, of the brothers and sisters, who formed part of her very life. She had spoken of them freely to Andrew, had told him all she had meant to do for them—all she still meant to do for them—and she had whispered shyly,—

“ We both will help them now.”

She had read no dissent in the kisses with which her lover favoured her, or the evasive words with which he praised her own unselfishness of heart, and avoided all promises for the future.

On the night on which Andrew had told her that he loved her, she had, for the first time in her life, utterly forgotten her family. That supreme moment had come in her woman's heart when she had no room for any object but the one loved best of all; that moment had passed away. Whatever her future love for her husband, it was not yet all-sufficient for her. He was first, but she

must have second loves too, to fill up the measure of her affections. So, on the night before her bridal, she thought, indeed, of him, but many and diverse were the thoughts that fluttered round other objects—round her father and mother, round Rupert and Alice, round the younger boys and little Maude. She never divided her husband from herself, but in those castles in the air she pictured them both of one mind, occupied in the same sweet work—namely, raising, helping, cheering that family whom Andrew Harvey intended so completely to separate her from.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE STORY OF THE CHILDREN'S HOUR.

THE wedding was over, even the honeymoon was supposed to be a thing of the past. Andrew and Hester had visited Italy, had seen Rome and Florence, had gone to Switzerland, and gazed on the snow-crowned Alps. Many, diverse, and beautiful had been the sights their eyes had rested on. They were both young, with impassioned and poetic feelings in their breasts, and the thoughts which had come to them had been as beautiful as the sights. They were happy, as they gazed and thought through a mist of rose colour. They loved each other, each believed the other perfect. So the brief days passed quickly, as blissful days will.

At last, the honeymoon over, the time arrived when Andrew, according to promise, was to bring his young bride to his father's house.

To Hester this visit was a prospect of satisfaction and pleasure; she had heard a great deal of her husband's father, she wished to know him and to love him for her husband's sake. To Andrew, on the contrary, this intended visit was accompanied by the first uncomfortable feeling he had experienced since his marriage.

This was the cause of his discomfort—he feared that Hester would speak of her family to his father, and so annoy him. He not only feared but he knew that Hester

would speak of her family unless he asked her not. He disliked doing this, he felt it might be unpleasant; he had an undefined idea that Hester might rebel. At any rate, he loved her far too much to bring even a shadow of a cloud between them. And yet he must say something. There was a certain look he must not see on his father's proud old face; his Hester must not cause it; his beautiful young wife must inspire respect, not contempt, in his father's breast. He thought a great deal about the matter, and as they drove rapidly in the old family carriage to his father's place he determined to give his wife a hint. She was clever; she might understand him without his being obliged to speak more plainly.

"Hester," he said, "I have told you a great deal about my father. I expect you will love him, and I hope and believe he will care for you."

"I have thought about him, Andrew," she replied, "you can scarcely believe how often. I have pictured him over and over to myself, and I fancy him just as you described him. He must be noble, Andrew. Perhaps he was something like you when he was young."

The look with which these last words were accompanied made Andrew smile. He took his wife's hand in his.

"I am not half so good as my father, darling. If there is a man in all the world truly worthy of veneration, it is my father. You don't know, I can never tell you, what his life has been, what his troubles have been. I can never, never tell you what he has done for me. Hester, you must comfort him; a woman knows, without saying much, just the right way to comfort a man. You shall give him a daughter's love."

"I will try," answered Hester, humbly.

Her husband looked at her, paused, cleared his throat, and began again.

"He is old. I have told you that for years he has lived a very lonely life; in consequence it is rather an effort to him to see a fresh face, even though that face is yours, my darling. He will soon get at home with you, and you will be the best of friends; but he has a peculiarity; may I warn you about it, Hester.

"Certainly, husband; I am most anxious to understand him."

"In talking to him don't chatter away about the people you know in London, your own people, or any others. He hates hearing about strangers; he takes no interest in them, and it always reminds him of how long he has been out of the world. You understand me, Hester? He does not care to hear about people he has never seen. You will remember not to talk about strangers when speaking to him."

Something far more in her husband's manner than in his words jarred upon Hester. She looked up at him in some surprise; she failed to understand him; but the faintest tinge of discomfort clouded the sunshine of her happy heart. After a brief pause she answered simply—

"I will remember."

With these few words Andrew was obliged to be satisfied, and the first evening passed off well.

Hester, without being awkward, was a little shy; without experiencing fear, a sensation utterly unknown to her nature, she yet felt a little awe of the aristocratic old man who was introduced to her as her husband's father.

This shyness and awe but added to her charms in her husband's eyes. Never had she appeared to him more beautiful, and he felt that she must surely win her way into the heart of the only other being whom he loved. During that first evening Hester made not one allusion to those obnoxious relations whom Andrew so

cordially detested. And he believed that she had taken his hint well.

He was mistaken. In truth, in very truth, Hester had not taken his hint at all. His words had puzzled her; but their true meaning she had utterly failed to comprehend. Her husband's manner, not his words, had caused her a passing pain; but the true name of that pain she had not learned.

Andrew had warned her not to speak to his father about strangers; he had said that strangers would not interest him. Hester had instantly determined not to allude to Mrs. Claymore or any of her school friends, and, perhaps, not to say too much about her own dear people; but here she had made a mental reserve, for she felt that she could so talk of those she loved as to interest any one in them and their fate.

The first evening, however, passed away well, and Andrew's hopes were high. His father was polite to his young bride, and surely his young bride was charming; but the next morning at breakfast affairs did not go quite so smoothly.

Hester was less shy, was in excellent spirits, and chatted away far more freely than she had done the night before.

They were talking about Rome and a certain picture there which had attracted their mutual admiration; Hester suddenly laid her hand on her husband's arm.

"You remember how I puzzled you about it, Andrew," she said; "I assured you I had seen it before—that I knew it perfectly."

"And I said that it was impossible, my love, as the picture in question has never been either photographed or copied."

"Yes, yes; how puzzled I was! but I remember it now, it has all flashed upon me quite suddenly. My father visited Rome when he was young; he saw the

picture—it attracted him as it did me. He told us the story of the picture in ‘the Children’s Hour.’ I never forgot it. That is it, Andrew; the puzzle is out.”

Her eyes were bright, and a beautiful colour had risen into her face. Sir Andrew was watching her intently.

Her husband tried to laugh, but his laugh was scarcely a success.

“The mystery is cleared,” he said coldly; then he rose and turned to his father. “But this can scarcely interest you, sir. Hester, if you have finished breakfast, I will take you round the grounds.”

“And I will accompany you,” said Sir Andrew.

They went out together, and the morning passed, though not without one or two more allusions on Hester’s part to her parents, and brothers, and sisters.

She was very happy, and never noticed how on each of these occasions Andrew turned the conversation, and Sir Andrew favoured her with a fixed and very piercing look. That night her husband thought it well to repeat his hint once more.

“You are making progress with the dear old man, my love; he will soon be fond of you, and you will become his daughter indeed; but you must not forget his little peculiarity.”

“Not to hear about strangers, Andrew? Oh, yes; I have not forgotten. I have kept it in my head all day. I have not breathed a word about Mrs. Claymore, nor heaps of people in whom I take an immense interest. I assure you I found it very difficult, as their names were always crowding to my tongue. Dear husband, I think *you* were the one who forgot.”

“How so?” asked Harvey.

“Why, this evening, after dinner, you talked for fully two hours about your London friends, and I know they were strangers; for with each fresh name your father

used to say, 'Tell me all about him, my boy; I never heard you mention his name before.' "

"That is different, dearest; my father loves me so well that any one I care for, or even know, possesses a certain interest for him; besides, the names of most of the fellows I spoke about are familiar to him, at least he knows who they are."

Hester said nothing more; but she felt again a trifle puzzled and bewildered.

The wife and husband spent a week at Claughtonville, and during this week Sir Andrew was kind and courteous to his son's wife; but his son, who knew him well, saw that he had not as yet made any true advance to friendliness or understanding.

On the day, however, before their return to London, as they sat at luncheon and discussed many plans for spending the afternoon, Sir Andrew spoke suddenly. Bending his stately old head toward Hester, he held out his hand to her.

"Will you, my dear, gratify a whim of the old man's? I want you all by yourself, without that husband of yours. I should like to have a long chat with you, and 'three is trumpery,' you know. Will you come with me to the South Walk? You, sir," turning to his son, "may as well ride over to Hodgson's, and see about that mare I told you about this morning."

When Sir Andrew and Hester found themselves alone, the old baronet laid his hand on the young girl's arm, and again favoured her with a keen and searching look.

"My dear," he said abruptly, "I suppose you would like to tell me that you are the happiest woman in the world."

"I am very happy," answered Hester.

"I see you are, and that you may continue so, may I give you a word of warning?"

"What is that, Sir Andrew?"

"You must learn to face the difficulties of your lot. Perhaps you think there is no cross in the brilliant life which lies before you. You think your husband perfect (and he is a dear good fellow, but by no means without fault), you think everything perfect; eh, little girl, is it not so?"

"I think," answered Hester gravely and sweetly, "that God has given me great happiness. I am very grateful to God."

Sir Andrew laid his hand on her shoulder.

"I am glad, my dear, to find that you go to God with your happiness. Now will you promise me something? When your little difficulties and vexations and crosses come—for 'tis a matter of fact that such things must come to you—will you go to God with them also?"

Hester hesitated. She was not a woman to make a promise rashly. After a pause, she said, "When they come, Sir Andrew, I will remember that you asked me to go to God with them."

"That is right, my dear. It is well to know where to find a refuge; for crosses are sure to come where one least expects them. I thought I would give you a trifle of a warning. You are not offended, eh?"

Hester smiled. "I am grateful to you, sir," she said.

"That is right. Now take my arm, and as we pace up and down here talk to me about what your heart is full of."

"About my husband?" asked Hester.

"No, no, not about your husband. I know all about him, bless him! You are a good wife, but you think of others beside your husband, I warrant; tell me all about your father and mother, and your own family. They are—but never mind—out with it. Tell me about—what did you call it?—'the Children's Hour.'"

Thus adjured, thus counselled and entreated, Hester

did speak, and in earnest. The words she loved came well from her lips; the old home story—its virtuous side being only known to the innocent and loving child—she told with pathos, and even power. For nearly an hour Hester talked, and Sir Andrew interrupted her by neither word nor comment. When she ceased to speak he bent down and kissed her forehead.

"Now, little girl," he said, "the next time you want to have a good outpouring of your heart about these people of yours write to the old man, he will either come to you, or you shall come to him, and tell him that pretty story over again. Do you promise me, child?"

Hester promised, but she wondered a good deal. Who could blame her?

When they were alone her husband said to her,—

"What did you talk to my father about, Hester?"

"About my own dear people," answered Hester.

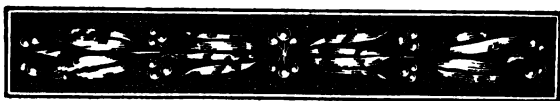
"He asked me to—he begged me to; and he was so nice, and so much interested."

"He wasn't dis"—began Andrew.

"He wasn't what, Andrew?"

"Nothing," answered Andrew.





CHAPTER IX.

AN INVITATION TO ALICE.

THE three months that had succeeded Hester's wedding had been very happy ones—joy in many new forms had crowded upon her. She read an ever-increasing satisfaction in her husband's eyes, and this fact alone must have made her affectionate heart brim over with bliss. In truth this husband and this wife saw no flaw as yet, either in their mutual lot or in each other. Neither of them perceived the little cloud, scarcely bigger than a man's hand, which was already appearing in the blue of their heaven. It was there, however, meeting them on the threshold of their home.

During their wedding tour Hester was happy; but on the first morning she awoke in the pretty house which was to be henceforth her home, she felt old and unforgetten sensations stirring in her breast; and these sensations made her believe that still greater happiness was in store for her. She should see her own people to-day. Her heart was not altogether her husband's, a part of it still dwelt in her old home. She should see her home to-day. She wished her husband would accompany her. She wished her father and mother to know him, and love him, and as yet they had seen so very little of him; but this she knew was impossible.

Andrew was about to undertake some editorial work which would require his presence for hours daily in the City. His duties were to commence this morning. No, he could not go with her, but she might go herself; her heart danced at the thought.

At breakfast, Andrew, who was eating quickly and with a preoccupied air, looked up suddenly, caught the brightness of his wife's face, and spoke.

"I see you won't be dull, darling, even though I must leave you. You will have lots to do looking over your new home and your new possessions—eh?"

"Oh yes, Andrew, I have my morning all planned out. I must go and make acquaintance with cook, and try not to feel too much in awe of her; then, of course, I must go over the house and make myself really realise that I am mistress of it; and then—then Andrew—I shall run away as fast as ever I can to Varley Street, and stay there until it is time to expect you back to dinner. I can scarcely tell you how I long to see my dear, dear mother, and my father, and all the others again."

Andrew held the paper which he was reading in such a position that his wife could not see his face.

"Some more coffee, Hester," he said, pushing in his cup.

As she poured it out he thought rapidly and with knitted brows—"I did not know she cared so much about them. I recognise that tone in her voice. I don't want to pain her, and this may be unpleasant, but I must make a stand at once."

He threw down the paper, drank off his coffee, and, rising, came to where his wife sat.

"Hester, you shall give a part at least of this first day to me. Will you, darling?"

"Of course I will," she answered.

"Well, you must have a longer conversation than

you quite reckoned on with Mrs. Cook. I mean to ask Staunton and one or two other fellows to dinner. I want quite a nice dinner—not a big one, but quite the right sort of thing, you understand. You had better go over to Mrs. Claymore and consult her about it; she understands the kind of dinner I want to perfection. Talk it over with her, Hester, and ask her to come and dine, if she can. You will like to have another lady with you to help you to get over the formalities.”

Hester smiled. “I shall like to have Mrs. Claymore,” she said; “and I shall do just what you wish, Andrew. I will try to have a perfect dinner, and a perfect little evening afterwards. I shall have a busier day than I anticipated, that is all.”

“But you must not rush about all day,” said Harvey, alarmed for fear the Varley Street visit should be crowded in after all. “I don’t want you to look flushed or fagged this evening; that would never do. I want you to be fresh enough to sing. Staunton has heard so much of your singing.”

“That dreadful Staunton!” said Hester, laughing. “Well, I will promise to be fresh, and cool, and in good voice; and if he is not very unendurable I will sing one song for him, and twenty for you. Will that suffice?”

Harvey said “Yes,” kissed her, and went away. He could add no more, but he was not satisfied.

Never in all his life had this young man felt more of a hypocrite than he did as he walked down the street this morning. He knew that he had deceived his wife, that he had not been quite open with her; he hated himself for what he had done. He knew also that he had but deferred the evil hour, and that Hester as yet knew nothing of his real motives. How could he open her eyes? This question was to be answered by circumstances.

When Andrew left her, Hester was, as is usual with

such inexperienced young housekeepers, beset by difficulties.

Her first dinner in her own house was not to go off so smoothly as she had imagined it would. Cook met her with an armful of objections.

Cook was an experienced woman in her profession, and she knew that the first thing necessary for her personal comfort, and also for her personal gain, was to obtain the mistress-ship of her young mistress. She had managed such matters before, and went warily to work.

She was very deferential, extremely respectful, and extremely obstinate. Every proposition made by Hester she raised a most proper objection to : such a dinner would be everything that was incorrect ; such a dinner was not now in season ; this dish could not go with that ; such a sauce must on no account stand in juxtaposition to another.

Hester was fairly driven to despair. Would cook on this first occasion take the whole responsibility of the dinner on her own shoulders ? She was sure cook had correct taste, and she, Hester, was not accustomed to ordering dinners.

Having gained her point, cook hummed and hawed. She did not quite like to. She would rather Hester decided. She would certainly take no after-blame, and she had no experience of Mr. Harvey's tastes ; some gentlemen liked their soups so different from others. In the midst of this torrent of many words Hester suddenly lost patience and determined to bring Mrs. Claymore to the rescue.

Leaving the discomfited cook, she ran upstairs, put on her hat and jacket, and in hot and, in cook's opinion, most undignified haste set off on foot to her friend's house.

Here, however, she was disappointed. Mrs. Clay-

more was out of town, and was not expected back until the following Monday. Hester had to return home tired, and her sweet temper just a little ruffled.

She foresaw that in the difficulties attending this first dinner, in the troubles of superintending a cook whom she did not understand, she must give up all idea of visiting Varley Street that morning.

This disappointment made her heart sore. She pictured her own people waiting and watching for her. She saw the weary look which suspense could bring creeping into her mother's face, and she heard the children saying one by one, that Hetty was a fine lady now and had forgotten them. The scene she conjured up brought the tears to her eyes.

Suddenly as she sat at her solitary lunch an inspiration seized her. She started up, rang the bell eagerly, and when the neat parlour-maid answered the summons, desired her to send for a messenger in haste.

Then Hester sat down and wrote the following letter :—

DARLING ALICE,—Give my love to mother, and kisses innumerable to the children, and tell them I am more sorry than I can put into any words that I can't see them to-day.

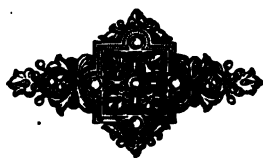
Tell the children to have patience until to-morrow, and they shall see their own Hetty again. Darling Alice, it is quite absurd of me, but the thought of not seeing any of you until to-morrow made me feel miserable. For half an hour your sister, who is the happiest wife in the world, found herself quite in the blues—then a delicious thought came to me, and I am acting on that thought in writing to you.

Alice, you must come over here at once and see me. Some friends of Andrew's are coming to dinner and you shall stay and dine and witness your sister's first efforts at hospitality. Come at once, darling, for I long for you.—Your loving HETTY.

In the sudden excitement which the hope of seeing Alice so soon had given her, Hester had forgotten the all-important subject of dress. Half an hour after she had dispatched her note she remembered it with a start

of dismay. She knew enough about her husband to feel sure that he could not tolerate anything incongruous at his table ; then it occurred to her that she had left one or two simple, but pretty, evening dresses behind her at Varley Street. Alice would make one of these fit, and she would do very well.

This fear laid to rest, Hester ran up and down stairs with a light heart ; she was charmed with her own thought, Alice could take Mrs. Claymore's place at her dinner-table. How delightful it would be to see her again ; and what a long confidential chat they might have together while the gentlemen sat over their wine after dinner !





CHAPTER X.

HOW ALICE SANG "MY QUEEN."

ALICE MORGAN was a young lady of resources. The instant she had read Hetty's invitation the all-important subject of dress crossed her mind, but the deficiencies of her toilet, so apparent to her sister, were not equally visible to her own mind—she had, as I have said, resources.

"I shall do quite well, mother," she had answered to her anxious parent; "no, I shall not wear those old things of Hetty's; they are much too dowdy."

After this speech, uttered in a very flippant tone, Alice had left her mother and the children to their fate, and had locked herself into the small attic which she called her bedroom. For three hours was Alice lost to public gaze, only once calling to the maid-of-all-work to go out in a hurry and bring her in some cheap lace. At last, at a very late hour, she appeared, her dinner-dress covered by a warm shawl, bade her mother a hasty adieu, and, stepping into a cab, gave the driver her sister's address in a well-satisfied voice. Her mother had got a peep at her toilet, however, and some misgivings crossed her mind; but no such misgivings visited the serene soul of Alice herself. At a few moments before seven she arrived at her destination, and was eagerly greeted in the hall by Hester, who

had been anxiously waiting for her for the last two hours.

"Oh, Alice! oh, my darling, this is joy!"

Then Hester fell back a pace or two, and the two sisters regarded each other. Hester was in white, with a few real flowers at her breast and in her golden hair. The sixteen-year-old Alice had thrown aside her heavy wrap, and stood erect in a far more magnificent toilet. Alice had eschewed the simplicity of either black or white, and revealed herself in all the glories of a tawdry pink silk; this silk, cut low in the body, with innumerable flounces—this silk, greasy and in part faded, Alice had purchased second-hand some months ago from a schoolfellow. She had waited anxiously for the moment when she might wear it. When she read Hester's note she felt that the blissful time had come. Now she stood in her sister's hall, a self-satisfied smile on her lips, and her wide-open blue eyes almost asking for the praise which she felt Hester must bestow upon her appearance. Hester gazed at her with dismay—with almost horror. It suddenly flashed upon her that in that dress, at least, Alice was vulgar. Andrew must not see her so. She took her hand and flew upstairs with her to her own dressing-room. Turning the key in the door, she pulled open one of her drawers, saying eagerly—

"Oh, Alice, dearest, you can't come down like that; no young girl wears that style of dress or that colour, or a low body and short sleeves! Pull it off as fast as ever you can, love, and you shall wear this white muslin of mine. See, it will fit you with a blue sash. Do be quick, love! Andrew will arrive any moment, and I must be downstairs to receive his guests."

Alice, however, stood obstinate and dismayed; she felt half-stunned; she did not dare to disobey her sister, but the first feeling of dislike she had ever experienced

for that sister arose now, as Hester, with trembling, eager fingers, unfastened the pink silk and invested her in a more suitable dress.

In the flowing Indian muslin, Alice, though sulky and flushed, looked, at least, presentable; and Hester was just completing her toilet by pinning some flowers into her hair, when there came a hasty and somewhat impatient knock at the dressing-room door. Hester knew the knock, and flew to open it.

"Oh, Andrew!" she said.

"Yes," answered her husband; "I am a little late. I shan't be five minutes changing my dress. Run down at once to the drawing-room, Hester; Staunton and Bradly are both there. I should have liked you to have been ready to receive them. Has Mrs. Claymore come?"

"No, husband, she was out of town; she will not be back until Monday. I"—

"Who is that?" said Andrew, who had caught sight, for the first time, of the shrinking and rather awkward apparition of Alice.

Hester stepped back, took her sister's hand and brought her forward.

"Don't you know her, Andrew? This is my sister; this is Alice. I asked her to come and dine when I found Mrs. Claymore could not come." She looked up eagerly; she was about to add, "Won't you welcome her to our home?" when she caught the expression in her husband's eye; that expression froze the words on her lips.

"Oh!" he said. He held out his hand coldly to Alice, then turned on his heel and went into his dressing-room; he slammed the door behind him. The next moment Hester opened it timidly.

"Is anything the matter?" she said.

"No, nothing; only I wish I had not asked Staunton. Do go downstairs at once, Hester."

And Hester went.

Harvey prepared himself for an unendurable evening, and as he donned his evening dress he repeated more than once to himself, "I wish I had not asked Staunton."

This was the first and most pressing annoyance. He resolved that if he got over this evening without some moral earthquake, he would take some decisive step to prevent such a *rencontre* in future. He almost wondered at Hester's blindness in not understanding him better than to bring Alice to the house. He resolved to open her eyes; to do so would indeed be necessary for all their sakes. When he went down to the drawing-room he was by no means in the best of humours, and the sight he met was scarcely calculated to soothe his perturbed temper. His own wife, quiet, beautiful—a lady in every look and motion, was entertaining Mr. Bradly, an intellectual, thoughtful man of about forty. She was entertaining this scholarly individual by listening to him with the best grace in the world—but his wife's sister! Alice bore likeness enough to Hester to testify to the relationship between them, but Alice was vulgar, her face was inharmonious, its expression wanting in good taste. She was essentially a commonplace girl, and had certainly never risen a quarter of an inch above the position in which the circumstances of life had placed her. Notwithstanding her now quiet dress, her whole appearance was most distasteful to Andrew. Though awkward, she was by no means shy. The discomfort which the change of dress had occasioned had quite vanished. She felt well pleased with her surroundings, and affected fine lady airs. Alice had a loud voice and a very strong Cockney twang, and this voice and twang she was now exercising in a noisy and excited manner for the benefit of Staunton, who stood over her, quizzing her unmercifully. The vain little

soul saw no banter under the young man of the world's polished speeches. She believed she was making an impression. Her head was full of the wildest dreams; she was perfectly happy.

Harvey, however, without hearing one word of the conversation, saw by the position of Staunton's back and the way in which he kept his shoulders, the true state of the case; he knew what thoughts were passing in Staunton's mind, and he chafed with fresh mortification and annoyance. Harvey did not in reality care a pin for Staunton, but Staunton had been the first to warn him about his wife's family; it was intolerable that he should be the first to find his predictions true.

Dinner was announced. Harvey found that he must take Alice down. He tolerated this fact; he was even pleased with it as a means of getting Alice away from Staunton. He placed her between himself and Mr. Brady; he knew that Mr. Brady would not notice her much, and he, for his part, resolved to freeze her into silence. He tried this plan with marked success during the first half of dinner. Alice was subdued, and even frightened; then he caught his wife's eye, and the pained expression in it smote on his heart; he became a little more friendly, and Alice thawed quickly. Again her voice rose sharp and shrill; she laughed loudly; she treated him to various home stories; she even called him Andrew. He read Staunton's amusement in the very tones of his voice. There was nothing for it but to resume the freezing process on Alice. He felt, rather than saw, that his wife was getting *distract* and nervous. Never had he undergone a more miserable dinner.

When they returned to the drawing-room later in the evening matters were scarcely improved. Alice went up to him and said in a stage aside, but really for the full benefit of the room—

“Andrew, I have just been scolding my sister. I

tell her I know I'm right and she's wrong. She never thought that I'd tell on her, but I will—I'm no coward."

These words were accompanied by a loud giggle.

Harvey drew himself up, saying in his haughtiest tones—

"I am not interested in ladies' discussions, Miss Morgan; and what my wife does not wish to tell me I do not wish to hear, even in jest." He turned on his heel.

Alice looked up at Staunton, who was standing not far away.

"Oh, law!" she said, "he isn't offended, is he? Why, I meant nothing but a joke. I did mean to tell him—just in fun, you know—that he was a little bit stuck up. Now, isn't he stuck up, Mr. Staunton? For my part, I've a fancy for gentlemen of a more sociable and lively disposition."

"Something like me, you know," said Staunton, stroking his moustache.

"Well, I never!" answered Alice; "the vanity of some folks." Here she blushed, and hid her face behind her fan.

Harvey had not heard the last remark, but he saw that Staunton was now laughing beyond all attempt at disguise. This was not a pleasing fact. Harvey rushed to music as a last resource. Both he and Hester could sing, so also could Staunton. Bradley would be only too delighted to listen, and it would be delightful to leave that intolerable Alice out in the cold. The husband and wife sang a duet, then they had one or two trios, and then a solo from Hester, whose voice was a very true and delicious contralto.

So far things went well, but the Fates, who were manifestly against Harvey to-night, soon interposed.

Alice, who had yawned during the singing, was seen

to speak eagerly to Staunton, and the next moment he and that young lady approached the piano together.

"Now tell," she said, giving his elbow a nudge.

"Miss Morgan is so very kind as to say she will favour us with a song. She is very good-natured, I am sure, for she says nothing gives her greater pleasure than to use her powers for the benefit of an appreciative audience."

"Yes, and to a good piano," put in Alice. "I hate a kettle-drum like we have at home."

"Pray favour us," continued Staunton, for every one else was silent. "What songs do you prefer? Do you use music? Mrs. Harvey, perhaps you can guide me as to your sister's tastes."

"Oh, she knows nothing about me," put in Alice. "I learned singing with Letitia Lee. Letitia has a perfect voice—quite thrilling. I can sing a great many songs, and I never use music. I hate that artificial style. I sing from my heart. I like love-songs best—yes, I *do*, Hetty. I know 'tis queer, but I'm candid. I could sing 'My Queen' if you like, Mr. Staunton. I know 'tis a gentleman's song, but I often sing it. I dote on 'My Queen!'"

"And so do I," answered Staunton; "I agree with you—I also dote on it. With Mrs. Harvey's kind permission, we must have that song, and no other."

But just then, just when Alice was seated at the piano, which Hester had vacated in her favour; just when she was about to raise some most shrill and untaught young notes, and Harvey was meditating a rush from the room, there came an interruption. The drawing-room door was flung widely open, and the butler, in a sonorous tone, announced "Mr. Rupert Morgan."

Harvey was a calm, self-possessed man, but on hearing these words, and on seeing the very uncouth

youth who accompanied them, the hot blood rose to his temples. Hester had also flushed—she saw what her husband saw, but with different eyes. To Harvey, young Morgan was only a very uncouth and rather vulgar lad of eighteen—a lad who dared to come into his refined drawing-room, and amongst his aristocratic friends, in a shabby greatcoat and with muddy boots; who still further dared to presume on relationship—to call him “brother,” and his wife “sister.” To Hester, on the other hand, he appeared surrounded by a very different atmosphere. She saw neither the shabby coat nor the muddy boots—only the great dark eyes of the brother she loved. To her he was no awkward lad, but one of her own—the one in the home circle nearest in age to herself—her Rupert, who had played with her and kissed her, and shared all the secrets of her life; he was a wayward, disagreeable youth to others, but Hester knew his heart—she loved him better than any of her other brothers and sisters.

Now, at sight of him a glad cry broke from her lips; she forgot her husband, her guests, everything in the world but the lad himself. She ran to meet him, threw her arms round his neck, and kissed him. It was a most natural action, but nothing, with his fastidious tastes, could have displeased Harvey more.

“Pray, no more in public, Hester,” he said in a low but freezing tone. Then he conducted his unbidden and unwelcome guest to a seat.

Young Morgan, very black and sulky, for Harvey's words could not be mistaken, sat and chafed inwardly. He had none of Alice's *sang froid*; he felt himself getting redder and redder; his position seemed intolerable; but he was the kind of lad who could be desperately rude if he was driven to extremities.

Mr. Bradley and Staunton had witnessed the little episode of his arrival with widely different eyes.

Staunton had read Harvey aright; Bradly, on the contrary, had seen Hester's soul in her eyes, was touched with the swift glance exchanged between the brother and sister, consequently he took Hester's view of the matter. He now approached young Morgan, sat down by him, and began to talk. He soon contrived to put the awkward lad at his ease. He was a clever lad enough, with none of Hester's polish or refinement, but with many of her fine qualities. The same look of almost pained earnestness dwelt in the eyes of both; in both there was an infinite capacity for devotion, fortitude, suffering; and both would have died rather than forsake a being once truly loved. Yet was young Morgan a very bear, and Harvey felt his presence to be almost an insult.





CHAPTER XI.

THE LITTLE RIFT.

IT was midnight when the husband and wife found themselves at last alone.

Alice, flirting up to the latest moment with Staunton, had departed; Rupert had also taken his muddy boots and uncouth self away.

The husband and wife were alone, and Harvey was about to give expression to some of his pent-up feelings. He came up to the hearth where his wife stood, took her two hands in his, and spoke.

He had prepared his words, and they came out slowly.

"Hester," he began, "I don't want to blame you."

She looked up at him with eyes half-startled, half-frightened. She had felt a little of both sensations since Rupert's arrival.

"I don't mean to blame you, darling," he continued—here he stooped down and kissed her—"but, my wife, this must not happen again."

When he said, "my wife" she took his arm and herself circled it round her waist, then she laid her head on his shoulder, looked up at him, and said—

"Well, dear husband?"

"Those people must not come here again."

She moved a little away from him, looked intently into his eyes, and said—

"Do you mean my brother and sister?"

"I mean the boy and girl who came here to-night. They are not used to society. I don't wish my friends to meet them—they are not to come here again?"

"Do you mean that my brother and sister are never to come here again?"

"I have said it."

Hester moved quite away from him; with wild perplexity, and some anger in her face, she gazed into his. Then she sat down on a low chair, crossed her hands in her lap, and said in a helpless kind of way—

"I don't believe you."

Her bewilderment and half-frightened anger touched Harvey, and awakened all the passionate love he still felt for her.

He knelt down by her side and took her hand in his.

"My own Hester, my wife, my beloved, don't look so. God knows I hate to pain you. I would not, if there were any other possible way out of the difficulty. Don't misunderstand me, Hester."

"I know I am misunderstanding you," she answered; "it is quite impossible you should mean what you said just now."

"No, dearest, it is possible—listen, let me explain it to you."

"It cannot be possible," she continued, unheeding his interruption. "You cannot mean that my own people are not to come to my own house; that my own Alice, and Rupert, and the children, and my father and mother, are not to be at home here, are not to see me when they like? Husband, if indeed you mean that, you are not the man I thought you were, you are not the Andrew I gave my heart to—but you don't mean it, you are only saying it to frighten me. You can never surely mean that, which would break my heart."

Here she burst into tears. Her tears were not

pleasant to Harvey. He disliked all tears in women ; he considered them petty and womanish, revealing the weakness of the sex.

Hester's now he believed to be drawn from a very highly wrought and exaggerated sentiment ; he disliked both the exaggeration and the tears. Still he was kind, he allowed no impatient exclamation to come from his lips ; he put his arm round his wife and allowed her to weep some of her tears away on his shoulder.

When she grew more calm he spoke, bringing all the cool judgment of his manhood to bear on his words.

"Hester, my dear, you must be reasonable. The high-flown words you used just now were unnecessary, were even ludicrous. God knows I would not give you one pain, my Hester, far less break your heart. Now, listen to me : did we not say we would trust each other utterly ? "

"Yes, husband," she said, wiping away her tears and raising her head.

"But words are nothing that do not lead to actions. I now ask you, Hester, to put your trust in force. I make a reasonable request of you, Hester : it is this"—

"Yes," she said.

"I will mitigate my first request. I will not make my sentence utter banishment, but, Hester, dear, do not ask that ill-educated boy and girl to come here in the evening again."

She was about to speak, but he laid his hand on her lips.

"No, do not interrupt me ; I must bring your common sense to bear on this matter. Hester, when I married you, I felt that God had given me the priceless gift of a wife possessed of all those virtues that make a woman a true helpmeet to man. You are neither childish nor weak. Strong as your affections were, I saw that you

could keep them under control. In short, Hester, I believed you to be a noble woman, and as such I made you my wife. Then I saw that my darling had a weakness, that she saw her own people through rose colour—that—that—but I will not pain you, Hester—only this: I could not have married any other member of your family."

"When you married me, you brought my father, and mother, and brother, and sisters, into near relationship," answered Hester. "Either with them or away from them that fact remains unchanged. I do not suppose you would be very likely to speak against those so nearly connected with you."

Her tone was quite cold and proud. It was now Harvey's turn to feel dismay; he continued, however, in a conciliatory tone.

"Hester, you *must* look on this in a common-sense way. Now I appeal to your good sense—you have been well-educated, and in Mrs. Claymore's house have moved in good society. I appeal to you, Hester, I ask you to answer me truthfully, if you think your sister Alice behaved as a ladylike young person to-night?"

"She did not," replied Hester. "Alice has been neglected, she has not had my advantages."

"My love that was not your fault; the fact remains unchanged, be the cause what it may. Miss Alice Morgan is a vulgar and utterly unformed girl. Can you wonder that your husband would rather not present her to his friends as his wife's sister?"

"No," replied Hester, "I see what you mean."

"Well, you have granted so far."

"No," answered Hester, "I have granted nothing; I only said I saw what you meant."

"Yes, my love, and seeing it is enough. Now, Hester, these are the plain facts: you are fond of your sister, you see something in her beneath the common exterior,

which makes you love her. I presume you also see something in that uncouth lad, round whose neck you threw your arms this evening ; but you must forgive me if I can only perceive in one a very common order of mind and appearance, and in the other those remarkable muddy boots, the traces of which will give John some trouble to remove. You cannot wonder at this, Hester, can you ? ”

“ No, Andrew, I cannot wonder. I see what you mean. I am sorry they gave you annoyance. You cannot be expected to see them with my eyes. They shall not come here again in the evening, dear husband.”

She smiled at him, and kissed him, then sat down again by the fire.

Nothing could be sweeter than her smile, or gentler than her manner.

“ That is right, dearest,” answered Harvey, “ that is what I want.”

He stood by her and took her hand in his. He pressed his strong fingers over hers ; she did not withdraw them, but neither did she return his pressure.

She sat, no frown whatever on her face, outwardly very quiet, and even content, her eyes fixed on the fire ; but the eyes gazing into the flame were blank, gazing inward so intently as to be blind to outward sight.

Alas for the man as he stood there ! The woman he loved, who was his wife, his helpmeet, his all in all, was looking full at his imperfections.





CHAPTER XII.

A FALSE STEP.

HESTER HARVEY was scarcely a wise woman. She had believed in impossibilities. She had supposed that what she saw in her dreams could be realised in her waking moments.

Hester had dreamt a very fair vision. She had dreamt on from the moment of her engagement until to-night; she had built for herself a castle in the very clouds, and in its rose colour and ethereal blue she had lived and been happy.

To her young imagination Harvey had presented himself as no common man, as a hero, a knight of ancient romance; nay, more, as an idol, a god.

Harvey was perfect; in him was there no flaw to be seen.

This perfect being, this hero of her first worship, was to aid the young and enthusiastic girl in her life's mission.

From her earliest days Hester had set before herself a task. She would go on no distant quest of good; she would become no hospital nurse, nor enter the sisterhood of any religious order. No; she would work where her heart was—she would help her own. That weary look on her mother's face—she would chase it away with perfect content and rest; her father's

ambitions, his pinings after wealth and position should be realised.

Really ignorant of life and nature, she saw no flaw in her father. She believed his aims to be natural and laudable. Yes; she would help her father and mother, but she would also aid with a firm hand those younger than herself. Rupert—proud, sensitive, full of hopes and also of despairs—must be advised, counselled, cheered up the steep ascent of the Hill Difficulty. Alice also needed much. Hester had often been anxious about Alice. She was reckless; she was decidedly common: she had taken up many of the ways of a third-class school which she attended.

Hester felt that Alice's faults needed care. She believed they could be rectified, for she saw, with the keen eye of love, virtues beneath the follies, and depths beneath the shallowness.

In this life-work Hester saw in her husband a help-meet—some one who would aid her, who would bring his strength to meet her weakness. She believed in the piety of her task; his nature was noble, he must respond to it.

Andrew had no near home-ties of his own except his father. No one claimed near relationship with him. All the more reason, in Hester's eyes, why he should help those whom, by marrying her, he had brought into close connection.

When first they were engaged, Hester had told some of her hopes to her lover, and had read no dissent in his eye or smile; during their wedding-tour he had even helped her to collect some small gifts for her family, and had showed no weariness when she spoke of them.

Yes; her dream had gone on unbroken. Sweet, harmonious, radiant with hope and good had been her vision—until to-night. But now, to-night, as she lay

with her eyes wide open on her bed, she was awake—her dream was over, her castle lay in ruins at her feet.

The husband who slept peacefully by her side was no hero—he was a man, with a man's imperfections; he was a natural human being, not a god; but Hester wept for the god, she mourned for the impossible.

For a time she could think only of this fact; then the immediate cause of her sorrow returned to her. Her husband would not help her in her life's mission, that was manifest. She had been blind for a long time, but now her eyes were widely open. She had scarcely blamed Andrew for being annoyed at Alice's flippancy, or for chafing at Rupert's muddy boots—these were blemishes which her sensitive and refined husband could not fail to notice.

No; Hester expected this—she had been prepared for this—but she had expected it in a very different form. She had expected her husband to see the defects of these young people, but she had also believed that he would aid in their reformation; that he, with his knowledge of young men, would know best how to promote Rupert's career, and that he, who all his life had moved in good society, would tell her with what words to correct Alice's faults. It was an unnatural dream of the young wife's, but she had dreamt it.

Yes, she had dreamt it. She was awake now; her dream was over. Andrew had indeed spoken of the faults of her brother and sister—but how? As of those utterly beneath him; of those in whom he could take no possible interest. They must not be presented to his friends; they must not pollute his house with their presence. He despised them, he was ashamed of them, and they were her own people—flesh of her flesh—her own, whom she loved passionately.

She wept aloud; she felt bitter in her sorrow and despair. Had she known all this, would she have

married Andrew ? With this thought, the return tide of her affections approached her husband. After all she loved him best ; though she no longer considered him perfect, he was still far dearer to her than all the rest of the world ; to have refused him would have torn her heart in two. After all, was she not expecting impossibilities ? He had scarcely seen her people yet. When he knew more of them he would learn to care for them, and take an interest in them.

This state of things must surely come to pass ; she would try and be patient, and hope on. In her now repentant state toward her husband, she took up his hand, nerveless with heavy slumber, and pressed it to her lips.

In the morning Andrew, who remembered the night's scene and scarcely enjoyed it, hurried to his day's work without exchanging many words with his wife. He could not forbid her to go to Varley Street, although he hated her to go. He hurried away, feeling uncertain and uncomfortable. Affairs were far worse than he had believed they would turn out to be.

Hester's people were intolerably low and vulgar, and Hester herself was intolerably fond of them ; her ideas about them were childish and absurd ; her conduct about them was undignified ; and the way she kissed that dreadful brother of hers last night before his friends was wanting in every good taste.

Harvey was, indeed, by no means perfect ; and this strong feeling on Hester's part was the thing most likely to bring his faults into prominent play. He felt that he could even be jealous of these low people ; their influence over his wife was all that was pernicious ; he must sever this close connection, and that without delay.

As he walked quickly to his office, for he generally performed the journey on foot, he thought of many

plans by which he might effect this purpose. Finally, he resolved to ask his father to aid him; for by some means and in some manner the Morgans, every member of them, must be got to leave London. He believed that with his father's influence and his own this could be managed, and his spirits rose at the thought. He had made up his mind to act on this idea, and without delay, when he heard some one calling him. At the same time a carriage was drawn up to the kerbstone, and he recognised in the very pleasant and cheerful voice that addressed him that of Mrs. Claymore. She had returned to town sooner than she had expected, and was now on her way home.

"Get in, Mr. Harvey," she said, making room for him by her side. "Come home with me, and have a cup of coffee; I have so many things to say to you, and to hear from you. Why, I have not seen you since your wedding. Get in at once, and tell me all about my child Hester."

No person could have been more welcome to Harvey in his present mood than Mrs. Claymore. Was she not Hester's most influential female friend? and surely Hester needed the advice of such a friend just now.

Poor Harvey! he took a false step. He accepted Mrs. Claymore's invitation, and before he had been an hour in her presence, that very clever woman of the world had extracted from him all his feelings with regard to his wife's family.

Mrs. Claymore sympathised with him, and promised to help him: but the step was a false one—the note of discord was struck.





CHAPTER XIII.

ITS IMMEDIATE RESULT.

LATE that afternoon, after Hester had paid a hurried visit to Varley Street, and had returned home a good deal tired and depressed, she found Mrs. Claymore before her. She was very fond of Mrs. Claymore, and welcomed her with sincere affection. Tea was ordered in the cosy little drawing-room, and the two women sat down to enjoy a long chat over this very social beverage.

Hester talked of her foreign tour. She laughed—she seemed in excellent spirits. The older woman answered her, made interested rejoinders, and watched her intently. Nothing could have given Mrs. Claymore more entire satisfaction than the confidence that had taken place that morning. Mrs. Claymore was a kind-hearted woman, but she liked to feel herself of importance. She surely was of importance now. Mrs. Claymore, too, felt that she might have a mission—that of furthering Harvey's aims. All her sympathies went with Harvey; he had not asked her to bring his wife round to his opinions, but surely he had wished her to do so. And who could better counsel Hester, and advise her in the way in which she should walk than this woman, who was her best friend?

So she thought, knowing nothing of the nature with

which she had to deal, understanding no portion of the heart of the girl whom she had helped and almost brought up.

With her second cup of tea Mrs. Claymore began—

“Your husband told me of your little party last night, my dear. I hope the cook performed her part satisfactorily?”

“She was a little troublesome at first, but when I gave her her own way matters went smoothly,” answered Hester. “I found,” she continued with a smile, “that her own way was a very good one; at least it resulted in a very nice little dinner.”

“Lucky girl! and your husband was satisfied?”

“Yes,” said Hester; “at least I suppose so; he said nothing about the dinner.”

She bent over the fire—her face, which had been sunny and pleasant, became clouded—she remembered what her husband had found fault with.

Mrs. Claymore continued—

“And who were your guests, Hester? I know you intended to give me an honourable place at your table, but who had you, my love?”

“Mr. Bradly, Mr. Staunton, and my sister Alice,” answered Hester.

“Your sister! that girl who”—

“You have never seen her,” said Hester quietly.

Something in Mrs. Claymore's tones had aroused her suspicions. She turned round and looked at her steadily. Her gaze, wide, open, innocent, but with something of the expression of an amazed and aggrieved animal, confused that worthy woman, who changed colour and turned away.

The moment Hester saw her confusion she removed her gaze, fixed her eyes again on the fire, and after a moment's silence continued, in the same quiet and unimpassioned voice—

"You saw my husband this morning; you need not have asked me who my guests were—he told you."

Mrs. Claymore got very red.

"Well, my dear, the fact is, I drew it out of him, my love. I saw he was a little put out, and I felt so anxious about you, for the nicest young men are difficult to manage at first. Yes, he did tell me; he did not blame you; he certainly is *very* fond of you, Hester. I never saw a more devoted young man after three months of marriage. But of course he was put out—it was a very unfortunate *rencontre*, and before Staunton too. Staunton is of such good family, son of the Earl of Desert. It was very unfortunate his being there; had it only been Mr. Bradly it would not so much have mattered; he is a nobody, comes of no family in particular."

"He is very clever," said Hester, "and a gentleman; he is much more truly a gentleman than the other man—and"—

"Well?" said Mrs. Claymore.

"That is all," answered Hester. "If you please, I would rather not discuss my other guests, as they happen to be my own people."

Nothing could be more determined, more quietly inflexible than the proud and dignified look on the young profile, which was the only part of Hester's face Mrs. Claymore could see. She had not believed it possible that the young girl whom she had brought up and loaded with benefits could snub her, and yet she felt snubbed.

She read Hester's character in a new light. She loved her neither more nor less, but unconsciously her respect arose. She made a commonplace rejoinder, then seeing that Hester was absent, *distrain*, and likely to be very dull, she took her leave.

Hester went up to her dressing-room, and sat down

by the fire. She had not sat there five minutes before she heard her husband's step in the hall.

"I must show no difference to Andrew. I *must* not—I will not." This she said several times under her breath when his step sounded on the stair. She even forced herself to go out to meet him. Alas, that her step should be forced!

Andrew had come home in a good humour; his talk with Mrs. Claymore had comforted him much. With the release from fear he began to be a little self-reproachful, consequently his greeting of Hester was unusually tender and affectionate.

"My darling, you look a little pale and tired. Put on your pretty white dress in a hurry, we will have a cosy evening all to ourselves."

Hester tried to smile, kissed him, and obeyed; but she felt as she sat at dinner, as she talked to her husband afterwards, as she sang her favourite songs to him, then sat at his feet and allowed him to play with her golden hair, that the unclouded honeymoon indeed was over. That hand whose firm touch she felt, that strong right hand which had clasped hers, promising in its clasp protection, strength, the fullest trust and love, did it not belong to one who in a measure had betrayed her? Oh, why had he told Mrs. Claymore! this was her bitterest feeling—her thought of thoughts.

Hester tried to appear as usual, but she could not help being reserved. As her husband talked eagerly of his friends and his prospects, she found herself for the first time giving him a very divided attention. Her thoughts were now hovering round Mrs. Claymore, picturing the very words in which Andrew had spoken of Alice and Rupert, seeing the sarcastic smile on Mrs. Claymore's lips, and the flush of annoyance in Andrew's grey eyes; or they wandered away to her own old home in Varley Street. She had visited her home that after-

noon, had seen her father and mother and the children, and they all, father, mother, and all, had rejoiced over her, had welcomed her with tears and smiles, and yet they had tortured her heart; for her mother had whispered of a little help for Rupert through Andrew's powerful influence; her father had invited himself to dinner on the morrow; and Alice had begged of her own Hetty to fix a day for her to pay her a long visit, when she might see that delightful Mr. Staunton—Charley, he called himself—again.

To these clamorous demands of her family, Hester had given evasive answers—assured her mother that she would do her best for Rupert, that Rupert's welfare was very close to her heart; had put off her father with a lame excuse; had kissed Alice into silence; then had got into her own carriage, to fling herself into the corner and burst into tears. Alas, alas; what would they all think of her?

"You are not listening to me, Hester," said Andrew, for his wife had sighed heavily during his recital of a funny story. "What is the matter, darling?"

Before she could reply to him a servant came in, bringing her a note. The note had been left by a private messenger. Hester's colour mounted very high. She tore open the envelope and read—

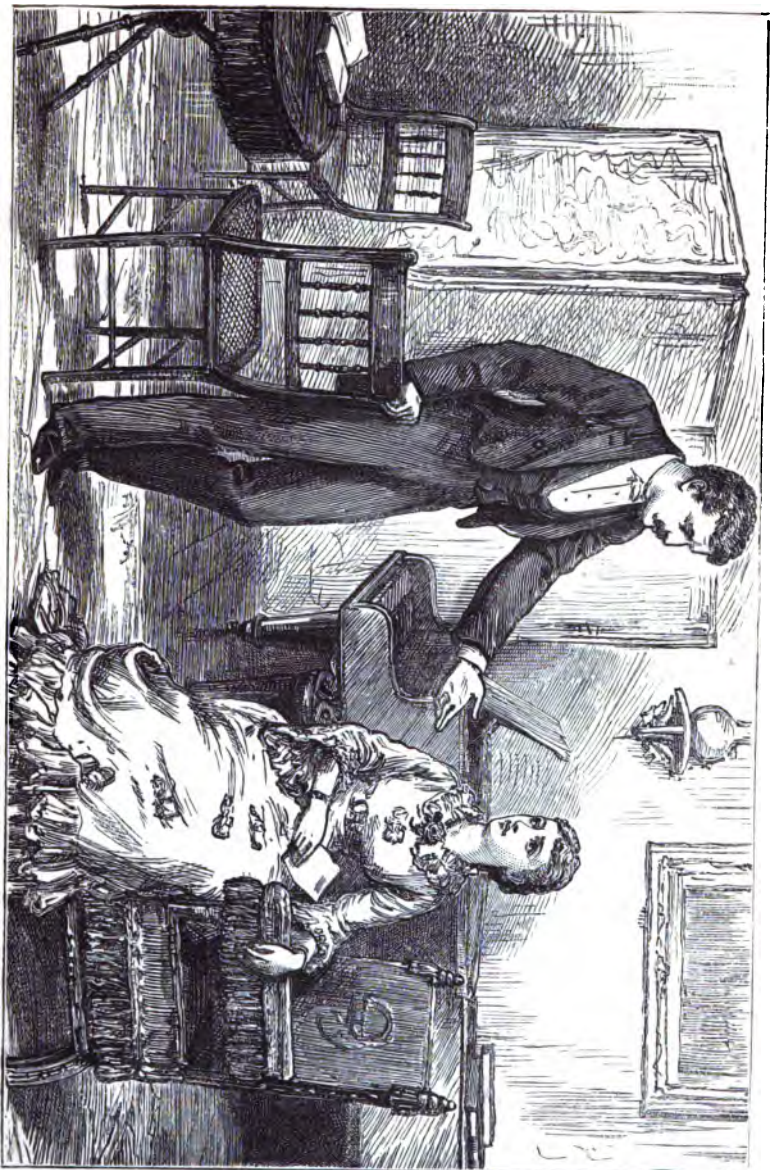
DEAR SISTER HETTY,—Mother told me of your visit, and how she had begged of you to get your husband to give me a pull up. I write at once to beg of you to do nothing of the kind. I will accept no favours from that snobbish husband of yours; so don't get into hot water on my account.—Your affectionate brother,

RUPERT MORGAN.

"Who is your correspondent, Hester?" said Harvey, who had been watching her face as she read.

"My brother Rupert."

"May I see what he has written?"



“May I see what he has written?”

Hester hesitated, then she placed the letter in her husband's hand, and turned away. He read it very slowly, a slightly amused smile on his lips, then he tore the letter into small pieces and put it on the fire.

"Silly boy!" he said. "How old is Rupert, Hester?"

"He is eighteen," replied Hester.

"Eighteen! a very touchy age. What if I give him a pull up without his knowing anything about it; eh, wife?"

Hester rose suddenly to her feet; her suppressed sorrow burst its bounds; she flung her arms round Andrew's neck and burst into tears.

"O husband, husband!" she sobbed; "why did you tell Mrs. Claymore? I will do anything for you—anything, anything. I will try and give them up for you, but don't ask me through another."

Harvey petted her, soothed her, called her by every endearing name he could think of, and yet failed to understand her. They were both in a labyrinth, and the right and the wrong threads lay in his hands; he could lead her out of the labyrinth, or he could entangle her and himself hopelessly in its meshes. Hester had herself given him the right clue: confide in her absolutely, tell her all that was in his heart, and he could lead her whither he willed; he failed to see this.

Tired out, Hester went to bed, and Andrew sat and thought.

Again he resolved to lose no time in getting the Morgans out of London. He took the first step towards the accomplishment of his purpose that night.





CHAPTER XIV.

SIR ANDREW'S RESOLVE.

IT was a glorious spring morning, and the old manor-house of Claughtonville, looking out with sombre eyes on its radiant flower-beds and clean-shaven lawn, on its more distant and grand sweep of park, meadow, and river, must have felt through its grim old soul (for surely its brick and mortar were alive with the doings of years, and long memories of the Harvey race)—it must have felt some of the beauty of the morning, and taken the fact of its own existence in a more genial and happier mood than usual.

The library window was open to the ground, and in the library Sir Andrew sat at his solitary breakfast.

The post had brought him the local newspaper, two or three circulars, and a single letter; he knew by the handwriting that the letter came from his son, nevertheless he finished his breakfast and read the most interesting items in the paper before he turned his full attention to the letter. He had kept his hand on it, however, as he skimmed his eye over his morning paper; at last, having performed what he considered his duty, he took out a pocket penknife and cut open the envelope. The following words, closely written, lay before him:—

MY DEAR FATHER,—You will read my thoughts, through the request I am about to make to you, so I shall enter on it without

preface. Hester is perfect, but her happiness may be tampered with ; to secure her against this I ask your aid.

I want the Morgans to leave London. This is imperative. Can you manage the matter without appearing to have anything to say to it ?

You have interest—unbounded, is it not ?—in the firm in which Morgan is clerk. They have a branch house in Manchester. I offer this as a suggestion.—Your affectionate son,

ANDREW HARVEY.

P.S.—Hester would send you her love, did she know I was writing.

“So he has never told her,” soliloquised Sir Andrew.
“I am sorry for that.”

He put on his hat and, placing the letter in his pocket, took a stroll round his grounds. But the letter was burning a hole in its hiding-place, for when he got to the south walk, where he had paced up and down with Hester, he took it out and read it again. As he did so he sighed.

“I am very sorry for this,” he said, half aloud.
“This is a bad business—I don’t like it. That boy and girl don’t understand each other. I saw it—I feared it when they were here. Sweet girl—noble girl—every inch a lady. If I had her for a wife I should not care two-pence about fifty fathers ; but young men will be young men. My poor lad ! God grant he does not spoil his whole life now.”

Sir Andrew paced slowly up and down his favourite walk, his hands in his pockets, his hat slouched forward over his eyes.

He was deep in thought, and his thought was anxious.

For years, now, Sir Andrew Harvey had led the life of a recluse ; the gay world had seen nothing of him ; the gay world had forgotten him. From one end of the year to another he had lived at Claughtonville, his heart buried in the past, living once again with each recurring season long-buried scenes. One living link alone connected him with the present, that link was the

son of his old age; touch that son, either for joy or sorrow, and you touched the apple of the father's eye.

Sir Andrew was perfectly unselfish in his love—his boy should inherit the old place, and the old name; but he never asked nor expected him to bear him company in his own old age. He was perfectly happy to live at Claughtonville alone, and hear tidings of and from his son.

He respected his son's ambitions; he read his articles with marked interest and attention; they were collected, hoarded, and treasured; for emanating from his son's pen they became part of his son, consequently part of himself. The most severe shock that Andrew could have inflicted on his father he had inflicted on him when he told him of his proposed marriage. It was a *mésalliance*, and Andrew was the first Harvey who had so degraded himself.

The old man's pride was touched to the quick, and for a time it was rampant over every better feeling; he parted from his son in anger, and with hot and bitter words; but in the evening the storm-cloud had passed away, and the star of love shone once more triumphantly in his wintry sky. Sir Andrew would forgive his son, would receive his son's bride, for he could not turn away from his only boy. But though he had done this, Hester's arrival at Claughtonville had been looked forward to by him with considerable dislike and annoyance.

She came; he found her sweet-looking, refined, lady-like. He saw these qualities without any special interest; he had expected these virtues in his son's wife, for it would be impossible for Andrew to love a woman who did not possess them. On the first evening, Sir Andrew saw nothing remarkable in Hester, nothing at all to enable him to overlook the fact of her low birth.

Strange to say, it was the very thing that Andrew most dreaded in his wife, the very thing which he feared

would alienate his father, which really drew him towards her.

In speaking of her own family, Hester's soft brown eyes had grown luminous, her cheek bright, her bearing simply dignified—a noble spirit sat triumphant on the proud young face.

Sir Andrew was a shrewd observer of human character; he read the emotions on Hester's face, and read them partly aright.

"Her people are low, but she is not ashamed of them, her head is not turned with her new position. I like that."

From that moment his interest was really awakened; he watched his son's wife narrowly; he also watched his son, and again the fear came over him that the marriage had been hasty and ill-advised. But he had a different reason now from his former one for thinking so, and he acknowledged to himself that this reason, in comparison with the former, was as life in earnest placed beside child's play.

He saw, though neither knew it themselves, that this husband and wife were, on the most vital point, at daggers drawn. They had come to no open misunderstanding as yet, but Sir Andrew feared that discord must ensue.

He knew that Hester would never give up her own people—he knew that Andrew would never endure them. All through the week they spent in his house he read this fact clearly.

After much thought, he resolved on a certain line of action. For this purpose he had seen Hester alone, and had drawn out her inmost feelings; he cared, indeed, nothing for her narrative, nothing whatever for her people, but he did care for the glimpse she afforded him of her own heart.

That heart—steadfast, earnest, true—was laid bare

before him. He was delighted with what he saw, he felt that he could respect such a nature.

Hester had some of the qualities which he had so passionately loved in his own first wife. The moment he saw this, he determined to help Hester, not only for his son's sake, but for her own.

Sir Andrew was not considered a very religious man by his neighbours—they judged him from an outwardly cold exterior, knowing, in truth, very little about him.

Sir Andrew feared and loved God; he did not speak much of this innermost and most sacred feeling of his heart, nevertheless it guided his life. In the time of his own great anguish and trouble he had found in it a shelter; he could bear to look at those graves of his six brave lads in the churchyard, because that inward comforter assured him of a reunion with them: thus it cheered him in the loneliness and weakness of his declining years.

When Hester spoke to him eagerly of her hopes and joys, and he saw only too clearly that such hopes could never be realised, he had counselled this young creature to turn to the God who had been his own mighty consolation.

She had answered him vaguely; he saw that she did not understand him—he was not a man to press the point.

Andrew's letter was scarcely a surprise to his father, still it was an anxiety.

He paced up and down the south walk, and his busy thoughts were not comforting. Suddenly he came to a resolve—the hour had come for action—he would act.

“I hate interfering; 'tis the worst thing in the world for a third person to have a finger in the pie. Nevertheless I don't know in the least how affairs really stand with that boy and girl. I will go up to town to-night and see for myself.”

Sir Andrew had not been in London for ten years.

He astonished his valet and butler by his peremptory and immediate orders. A telegram was flashed to Harvey; there was commotion at Claughtonville, and no little astonishment on the part of Andrew and his wife; and by ten o'clock that night the old baronet found himself a guest in his son's house.





CHAPTER XV.

SIR ANDREW'S COUNSEL.

"I WILL help you, Andrew," said his father. "I see the wisdom of your suggestion. I will help you, but on one condition."

When these words were spoken, the two men were driving in a hansom towards the City.

"I will see Gale at once, and make the proposal you desire to him, if you agree to my condition."

"What is that?" asked the son.

"That you tell your wife exactly what you are doing."

At these words the younger man started, and a look of consternation and anxiety came into his face.

"Tell my wife!" he repeated. "My dear father, you scarcely know what you are saying. Hester would never forgive me. My only chance is to keep her quite in the dark, and to let her suppose that her father has got this promotion—for of course it will be a money promotion—through an outside channel."

"She will find it out, Andrew—women always find out such things—and then, indeed, she will never forgive you."

Harvey was silent. They were now driving past the Thames Embankment, and in its comparative quiet the old man continued earnestly—

"I watched the face of that young wife of yours last night, and—forgive me, my lad—I saw a want there, which had nothing to say to her own people—it was the want of your full confidence."

Andrew coloured; he felt annoyed. A memory, too, came over him of the passionate way in which Hester had reproached him for bringing Mrs. Claymore to mediate between them. With this memory full in view, he could not but acknowledge that his father was right; but as he believed it impossible just then to act on his suggestion, it annoyed him.

After a short interval of silence, he replied in the haughty tone with which one man, however near the relationship, will resent the interference of another—

"I think I understand Hester, even better than my father does; but I thank you, sir, for your thought. I will consider your words."

The result of Harvey's consideration was scarcely satisfactory. His day had not passed without annoyances; his editorial work was not going quite smoothly. The fact was, his home anxieties were worrying him, and he could not give the full attention he ought to some critical papers.

His home life, too, was following him in a very disagreeable way into the City. At lunch he met Staunton, and Staunton had greeted him with a meaning smile, and had not only asked after his wife, but after Miss Morgan—doing this in the hearing of several other fellows.

Harvey wondered if Staunton had told that good story about his sister-in-law to the other men; he imagined that they all treated him with less respect than usual. Leaving his almost untasted lunch, he quitted his club hungry, and considerably out of temper.

In this state of mind, hurrying back to his office, he found himself almost in the arms of the most objection-

able member of his wife's family, namely, Morgan himself.

Morgan was effusive and affectionate. He turned with his son-in-law, and linked his arm in his. He talked noisily of his Hester, more noisily of himself; he was simply odious in the young man's eyes. At his office-door, he shook him off almost rudely, but his temper, ruffled before, was not improved. The several little untoward events of the day strengthened young Harvey's dislike to act on his father's suggestion.

Either he or the Morgans must leave London. Hester would certainly oppose this open separation from her family, and in the face of her open opposition, it would be very difficult for him to act. No, he could not tell Hester; he must endeavour to induce his father to aid him without this impossible condition.

The two men sat up late that night, and Harvey pleaded his cause well. Before they parted, his father promised to reconsider his resolution.

The result of this was a sleepless night for the old baronet. He thought—he pondered, and with the breaking of day a fresh idea occurred to him.

This idea he did not confide to his son; it quieted his own anxieties however, and he came down to breakfast in good spirits.

"Will you come with me to the City, sir?" asked his son.

"No," replied Sir Andrew; "I intend to spend this morning with my daughter Hester, if she will be kind enough to entertain me." He bowed to Hester as he spoke, who coloured with shy pleasure. Andrew also was pleased, and went more happily away to his business cares.

"My dear," said Sir Andrew to his young daughter-in-law, "when you are quite at leisure, shall we enjoy ourselves as I like best this lovely morning?"

"I am at leisure now," answered Hester. "What shall we do?"

"Delightful," said Sir Andrew. "We will take a hansom and drive to Regent's Park. Regent's Park is the next best place to the country in May."

In less than ten minutes they set off, Hester's face radiant with life and spirits—for the present she had forgotten every shadow of care.

At the entrance to the park they dismissed their cab, and walked about, admiring the very lovely scenery until they were tired.

Before, however, they at last had seated themselves beneath a wide-spreading oak-tree, Hester's spirits had flagged. She reproached herself for her own gaiety of heart; her thoughts flew back to Varley Street and the anxieties of her childhood's home, which were following her so quickly into her married life. That very morning she had received one of her mother's most weak and pitiful epistles, imploring her to visit her at her first leisure moment. She thought of it now, and as she seated herself beside Sir Andrew, she sighed heavily.

Sir Andrew had set himself a task of some magnitude, and Hester's sigh smote on his ear with almost a sense of relief, for it enabled him to break the ice. They had wandered to a solitary part of the park, and here he could speak out his very heart, without interruption.

He began abruptly.

"I want to confide in you, my new daughter. I will conceal nothing from you. I brought you here this morning to give you a confidence. Will you listen quietly to all that I have got to say, and not interrupt me, even though my words may give you great present pain?"

Hester looked up, startled and alarmed.

"What is wrong?" she said.

"Do you promise?" continued Sir Andrew, laying his hand on her arm.

"Yes, I promise. But what is it? You frighten me. Is it anything about my husband? Please don't keep me in suspense."

"Calm yourself, my dear; listen quietly to an old man's slow words. I have nothing new to tell you. I only want to give you some of my thoughts."

"I will listen to you," answered Hester.

"My dear, I am going to speak very plainly. I may pain you. I must pain you. The fact is, my dear young lady, the happiness of two—I may add of three—individuals now lies in your hands."

"What do you mean?" asked Hester.

"I mean this. Your happiness—your husband's—and yes, I may add, mine—now rest with you. A crisis in your life has come. On how you now act all your future will depend."

"Yes," answered Hester, "on how I now act. I don't understand you, but I will try to follow you. Please go on."

"You are not so happy as you expected to be?" said Sir Andrew.

Hester bit her lip, and turned away. "I—yes. I am happy," she answered after a pause. "I certainly have some anxieties, but I am happy."

"My dear, so young a woman, so recent a wife ought scarcely to have anxieties; they come later, but scarcely on the threshold of the honeymoon. There is something wrong."

"They are not about my husband," began Hester, "they—they"—

"Then indeed you are wrong," continued Sir Andrew. "Your husband ought to be your centre, your sun. Apart from him, you ought not to know cares sufficient to call them anxieties. But it is as I feared—it is

as I dreaded — your heart is torn with conflicting duties."

"What do you mean?" asked Hester.

"Since you visited me at Claughtonville, I feared for this. Daughter, I mean to be very plain with you."

He paused, looking hard into her face. She raised her eyes to his, then said quietly—

"Thank you, sir. I will confess I have a burden, and plain words may best help me how to lay it down." Then she turned away her head and closed her eyes. She said to herself, "He is going to speak against my own people, and I *will* bear it for Andrew's sake."

"When my son told me," continued Sir Andrew, "of his intended marriage with you, he brought me news that caused me much pain. Nay, my dear, don't start; I mean no offence against you. I did not know you then; but his news brought me pain, for this reason. I believe in the distinctions of rank; I believe that the people who are brought up in the same social circle, who have the same tastes, the same ideas, are the most calculated to make each other happy. I—yes; I will tell you, my pride was touched at a Harvey, the last of the old race, marrying a tradesman's daughter. Andrew knew my objections beforehand, and combated them well. He described you as you are, in glowing colours; but I must confess," continued the old man with a stately bend of his head, "that the warp and the woof of his description had truth for their element. I found you very much as he pictured you. But, my dear, at the time I had not seen you. I knew what lovers were, and I trembled. I whispered my fears to my own heart. They were these, 'Even if the girl is what my son pictures her, she does not stand alone—there are her people, she comes of a large family. It is impossible that they all could be as perfect as she is. Living in the same town they must meet; such discordant elements must

clash. Andrew's friends can never mingle with Hester's.'"

Sir Andrew paused, but not long enough to allow of a reply.

"Yes, Hester," he said, "these were my fears before I knew you; they were small indeed compared with those I entertained after I had seen you. I perceived, then, that you loved your people with no common love. I saw that your heart was divided between your husband and those with whom you had been brought up. I said to myself, 'There is trouble before that girl—there is trouble before her and her husband; they have both strong wills, their wills must quickly clash; the only chance of peace lies in the bending of one will to the other.' I looked from your face to your husband's, and I wondered which would yield. I saw that your affections would be sorely pressed; his pride cruelly wounded. But I could say nothing, I could only wait the result. I came up to London a few days ago, and renewed my observations of you both. You will forgive me, but an old man with an only son has keen penetration. I saw that what I dreaded had begun. And now, Hester Harvey, I have had my say. I have spoken plainly. I have been rude; but never mind, it is your turn now. Tell me all that is in your heart; blame me as much as you will."

This request Hester obeyed; but she did not blame.

At first she could only reply by some choking sobs; then her words came more freely; burning words, coming straight from her grieved heart. She wondered why she should confide in Sir Andrew. He belonged to the other side; he was against her own people. And yet she felt impelled to tell him all.

Thus it came to pass that Sir Andrew learned the story of Hester's heart.

She told it well; as such women, when the waves

and billows are overflowing, will speak. The dreams and longings of her whole life were laid bare before her husband's father. What she had hoped for in her marriage, how she had never thought of the distinctions of rank, of Alice's behaviour, of Rupert's manner, of what her mother expected and her father hoped; all this she told to the old baronet.

Only one thing did she conceal from him—only one pregnant fact was unspoken by her lips—the fact that her day-dream was shattered, that her husband was not the husband of her dreams.

Sir Andrew, who had his own counsels quite ready, listened to this long narrative with interest and compassion, reading plainly what the wife concealed, and respecting her for the concealment. The time had come when he must open out to her that scheme which he had thought of in the early morning.

He went warily to work; first drawing her attention back to her husband, and away from those who certainly possessed her lesser love. He told her one or two things she had never heard of before about Andrew—one or two events in his life which he knew would arouse her enthusiasm. A trifling incident which took place at school, an emotion brought into play at Oxford, these he knew would kindle her delight. When all her affection for her husband was brought into full play, he spoke.

"Now, my dear, I will take the liberty which your husband's father may venture on, and advise you. You have nothing to say to the past. Had you known what you now know, you might not have acted as you did; but you have nothing to say to that. Your thoughts must lie with the present, for the past has slipped out of your power. You believe that you have two duties, a duty to your people, a duty to your husband; these duties appear to clash; you say yourself that you are

puzzled how to undertake both. The plain thing, then, that appears to me—the right course to adopt, is to find out which is the greater duty, and like a true woman to abide by it."

"I have never confounded the fact," answered Hester, "that my duty to my husband comes first—before all. But the difficulty to me lies in the fact, why, when both are good, they should be separated—why should they not stay together?"

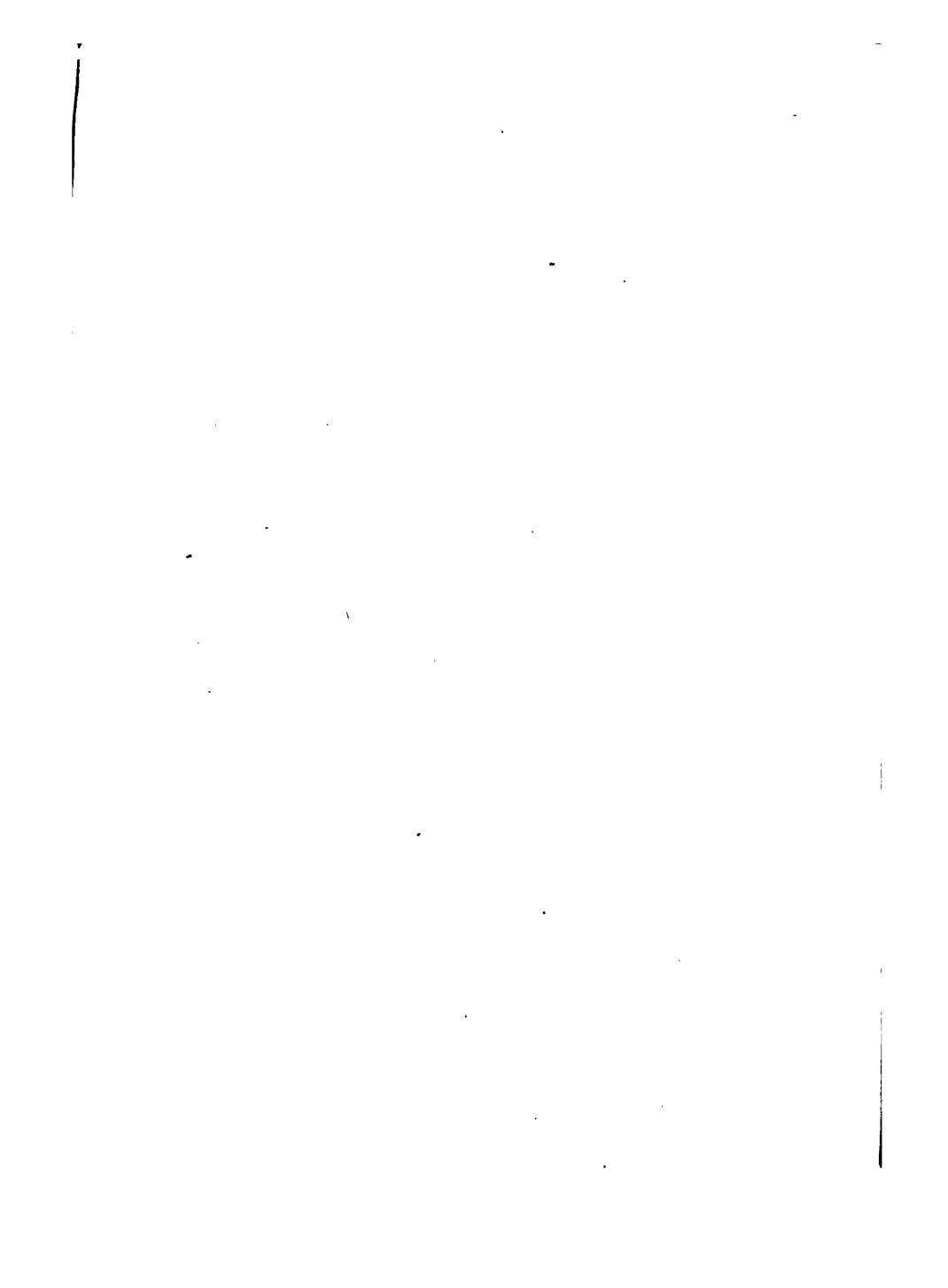
"If that time should ever be realised," said Sir Andrew, "I see but one way to its accomplishment. Shall I tell it to you?"

"Yes," said Hester.

"It is this—and bear with me, daughter—think of my words. This is the plan, Hester, which can save you all, which is your only chance. Your father is a poor man, I can better him; I can take away some of his money cares. I can do this openly, and will, if you give me leave. I can get him appointed to a situation, the duties of which he will be quite capable of performing, and the money value of which will be worth five hundred a year. You tell me he is very poor; thus he will have fewer cares, and—and"—

"Oh, I see," interrupted Hester, her cheeks rose colour, her eyes sparkling. "I see what you mean. Oh, how good you are! There will be more money, and mother will have comforts, and the children will be educated, and wear nice clothes, and—and—grow up refined, and as they ought, and it will come all right. Andrew will be no longer ashamed of them. I see it; how glad I am! oh, my darlings!"

"You have not heard me out, Hester," continued Sir Andrew. "These delightful results may come to pass. I will aid you in them; I will co-operate with you in the education of your brothers and sisters. Yes, Hester, those who can rise shall rise. I will give a helping





"Bending under the passion of her own aggrieved nature."

hand to such ; yes, we will both hope for the most brilliant future results. But the present, my dear, the present lies in the fact that your father's situation is in Manchester. If he accepts it, he must live there ; he, and your mother, and your brothers and sisters—even Rupert, who shall have a rise in life, must have it in the same town. For, my dear, I wish to separate you from your own people."

Hester started to her feet. She could have spoken to Sir Andrew, but she checked herself—ungovernable anger was in her heart, but she would not allow rude words to pass her lips to her husband's father. Neither would she stay with him.

Without a word she walked away ; no syllable escaping her lips, she left his side. Not one backward glance did she give, but went direct and quickly straight to the nearest entrance to the park. Here she hailed a cab and went home. She went quickly up to her dressing-room, looked the door, threw herself prone on the floor, tossed off her hat, and pressed her cheeks to her hot hands. By-and-by in sorer troubles, in keen and real anguish, the woman would be quiet. It was the girl now, bending under the passion of her own aggrieved nature.

Yes, she saw it all—her husband and her husband's father were ashamed of her and hers. Her husband had been very kind—her husband's father very courteous : for such people knew how to clothe their cruellest intents in the most courtly and gentle words, but the intent was the same. They must put up with her ; but *hers*, those who were as good as her, were to be banished, cast utterly out of sight. Her father, who had often declared he could live nowhere out of London ; her mother, whose every association was here ; her brothers and sisters, who were born here—all must go away to a place they knew nothing of. Why ? Because

she, Hester, had married a man who thought himself too good for her, who was utterly ashamed of those who had given her birth. Oh, why had she married him? why had she dreamed such a beautiful, untrue dream?—oh, why? Because—because—the answer rose up clear and instant, shining full on her like an angel of light—she loved her husband then; she loved her husband still; she loved him better than those who were to be banished for his sake. Was it possible, then, that for his sake she could submit to this banishment?

As this thought pressed upon her, she rose to her feet and stood leaning against the mantelpiece, one hand pressed to her perplexed brow. In truth her heart was being torn in twain, and her hot tears fell now heavily. Could she submit to this idea? Could she bend her will to this plan?

She saw the dark thoughts coming into the hearts of those at home; their wondering ideas with regard to herself; their complete misunderstanding of her; her own enforced silence under these cruel suspicions; Alice's pert retorts; Rupert's blunt words. Yes, this burden would come upon her. How could she bear it? In this perplexity she would ask no counsel from without, and her heart was too much agitated to allow her reason to guide her. Suddenly a memory returned to her.

"When you are in difficulty, go to God," Sir Andrew had said. She had no personal knowledge of God, but the thought came to her now, luminous and full of hope. Impulsive, with an eager humility and craving, she knelt down, pressing her bowed head on her hands.

"Please, help me; please, help me," she entreated.

She neither asked how, nor when; but when she arose from her knees, the first spark of a faith that was never to die was kindled in her heart.

Late, in the gloom of that evening, Sir Andrew

Harvey was startled by a pair of hands being laid on his arm, and a sweet face, tear-stained, and a little pale, being raised to his.

"You shall do as you wish," whispered Hester.
"I—I will bear it; it is right. I will myself tell my husband."





CHAPTER XVI.

BLUE SKIES.

FOR the next fortnight Hester, whose heart was sustained by what was to her a great self-sacrifice, felt happy. Like many another who has dreaded to take up a God-given burden, she found when she lifted it that she had magnified its weight. She saw that she could bear the coming trial more easily than she had feared. She was astonished, she was at first scarcely gratified, to discover that her father and mother regarded it as no trial at all. Her mother wrote herself to thank Sir Andrew; her father was profuse in his acknowledgments, telling her over and over how he owed it all to her; this was indeed a rise in life, for what would not five hundred a year do for people who were accustomed to struggle on on two? The children were in wild spirits—they were promised new dresses, a journey, a new home.

Hester, listening to these universal rejoicings, felt more and more puzzled: there was so little said about their parting from her. What she thought would have half killed them seemed to be borne with equanimity.

Alice, it is true, grumbled a little, and Rupert was as sulky as a bear, but Hester could scarcely flatter herself that either of these unpleasant states of feeling was caused by the knowledge that they must go away from

her. Alice was murmuring for the loss of Hester's home, her society, her friends. Rupert, guessing more shrewdly than the others the true state of the case, was all pride and bristles.

Hester tried to be thankful, but she knew, without putting it into either words or form, that another of her day-dreams had been shattered.

Sir Andrew, having gained Hester's assent and co-operation, lost no time in the carrying out of his plan. Bringing strong influence to bear, he soon got the situation he had hoped to get for Morgan, and in six weeks from the time it was first spoken of, the Morgans had given up their Varley Street home and had gone to live in Manchester.

There came a day when Hester stood with the children crying and clinging about her, on the Euston platform, when her mother's arms were round her neck, and her mother's most earnest kisses on her cheek and brow; but though there was present grief, she saw that not one of the home group, as they vanished from her sight, was broken-hearted. She returned to her own pretty house in Walter Street, Mayfair, to discover that the sun had come out there, metaphorically speaking.

Andrew had taken a holiday and was before her. He welcomed her with his old smiles and glances; again the tender look came to his eyes when he looked at her; again he was the Andrew of the engagement and the honeymoon. The day was lovely. They took a carriage and drove to Richmond; they went on the water. Andrew had belonged to the Oxford eight—how splendidly he rowed! Afterwards they had dinner at the Star and Garter, and drove home by moonlight.

This happy day in midsummer was but the precursor of many more as happy, and Hester had to acknowledge that a discordant element had gone out of her life. She was so happy that she sometimes reproached her.

self ; those smiles, that peaceful heart, were they not a reproach to the dear ones whom she no longer saw daily ? But the smiles and the peace would come, for now, just now, for a brief space, the sky was cloudless. Andrew's friends came again to his house ; they thought Mrs. Harvey's evenings perfect. Andrew was charmed with his Hester ; the wife of his dreams was his, her family were forgotten. In short, the lives of these two young people ran in deep harmonious currents, and Sir Andrew returned to Claughtonville a very happy man.

In the autumn Andrew and Hester again visited the Continent, and as his work did not immediately require the husband's presence in England, they stayed away until Christmas.

Christmas, this first Christmas spent away from her father and mother, Hester passed at Claughtonville. She sent innumerable gifts to the children in Manchester—bonbons, cakes, many and sundry trifles. She gave Alice a dress, Rupert an overcoat, to her father and mother she sent still worthier gifts. The money for all this was given to her by her husband, with the significant words, " Use it, my darling, in giving presents to those you like best."

These presents and long letters written to each and all, covered up every lingering ache in Hester's heart. Her Christmas was happy, and she had now other thoughts to take up her mind, for in the early spring God opened up fresh wells of love in her heart, and the affectionate daughter and wife became a mother.





CHAPTER XVII.

CLOUDY SKIES.

I HAVE said that the Morgans felt no regret at leaving London. The money gains, the novelty, the change absorbed them all, and prevented the play of any feelings that might have lingered sorrowfully round their childhood's home.

Mrs. Morgan, who had suffered so many difficulties in making her husband's small stipend cover their expenses, could not but rejoice at more than double that sum being placed in their hands. Undefined but very evident satisfaction reigned therefore in the breasts of the mother and younger children. Alice, too, though she owned to some disappointment in leaving Hester and London, enjoyed the prospect of a small allowance all to herself, and one or two other little comforts which their added means would give to her. Indefinite but real, therefore, was the pleasure which Sir Andrew's offer gave to every member of the Morgan family but two. These two were John Morgan and John Morgan's eldest son. The lad who had made his appearance in Hester's drawing-room in dirty boots and very untidy apparel, whose shy eyes were scarcely raised from the ground, and whose uncouth manners were unpleasant to behold, had nevertheless a keen observation.

One quick glance round did he give with those dark,

bright orbs, and the whole situation became clear to him. Young lad as he was, he read what was passing in Harvey's breast; he detected the disgust in his tone, and read the abhorrence he felt for him, Rupert Morgan, in every well-bred sentence that dropped from his lips. Boy as he was, he read more than was there, but, boy as he also was, he hated the man on whose countenance he had deciphered these hieroglyphics. Rupert Morgan had gone home with a chafing, burning sense of wrong; even Hester came in for a share of his displeasure. What right had she to marry such a coxcomb? He vowed that he would never enter Hester's doors again. But these feelings and vows he kept to himself, saying nothing to any one, only maintaining a discreet silence when Hester's name was mentioned. In truth, he felt that Hester was lost to him; but he was as reserved as he was proud, and spoke of his sentiments to none.

Three weeks after his unfortunate visit to Walter Street, he was startled, aroused, and for the time pleased, by a most unexpected rise in life. He was a clerk in a wine merchant's office; he was not particularly clever, nor a special favourite, and yet was he suddenly lifted above the heads of the other clerks. He was given a situation of some little trust, and with a small increase of salary, in Manchester. For a brief few hours he was delighted. He came home to find his father and family in a similar state of rejoicing. Sir Andrew Harvey had done it for them, had done it for them all; they were all going to Manchester, they were all, through Hester's influence, experiencing a rise in life. At these explanatory words, the young fellow's brow, so illuminated by a brief sunshine, became black and thundering. He saw it all; they wanted to get rid of them all, they were ashamed of them. Hester and her husband were ashamed of their own people; they feared any chance encounter with them, they feared

their fine friends ever being thrown in their way, therefore were they to leave London. They were to be banished because Hester had married a snob !

Rupert resolved that he would not go. London was large enough for both him and his sister—he would not go ! The next day he saw one of the heads of the firm, and respectfully, though with much pride in his voice, refused the offered promotion. His chief gazed tranquilly at the awkward young man, then replied in the measured tones which authority will sometimes assume, that in that case they feared they must dispense with Mr. Morgan's services altogether, as they only required him for the special post which they were about to assign to him. Rupert went away, silent and dismayed. He chafed, he raged, but finally, for penury would not quite suit his purpose, he yielded. But his feelings on going to Manchester were bitter and morose ; thus he was unprepared for that steady pressing onward which alone could enable him to win his way up the Hill Difficulty.

The other member of the family whose feelings on leaving London were far from doubtful, was Morgan himself. Morgan was indeed glad, and he knew it—he knew the reason of his joy. No sentimental regrets made him unwilling to leave London and London life ; on the contrary, a few things had occurred which made it desirable for him to quit this great centre of the world's industry. I have said that the City men, who knew a thing or two about Morgan, had pronounced him not altogether respectable. It was in reference to these City whispers, and to the small things which caused the whispers, that his heart rejoiced at the prospect of going to a distant part of the country. He was delighted with Hester ; she had done the very thing for him, without his even asking her, that he most wished her to do.

The man was not without some intuitions after right; he was by no means altogether bad, and his first resolve after he heard that his fears might be laid to rest, and a comparatively large income would fall to his share, was to turn over a new leaf. He had a memory of the old days; and he thought that he might resume them in Manchester.

With these feelings in his breast, he was loving to his wife, and almost unselfish in his attentions to his children, and he spoke of Hester as the guardian angel of the family.

Yes; he was very glad to go, and he told his daughter so during their farewell interview. She replied to this with a look which he failed to understand; her eyes, earnest and searching, begged for a little regret for the severing of the love of a life. The selfish man felt puzzled, but he failed to read his child's heart.

The Morgans went to Manchester, and for a time things went well with them. They took a fair-sized house, and furnished it cheaply with the proceeds of the sale of the Varley Street belongings. Alice's tastes were consulted in the drawing-room arrangements, and the drawing-room was radiant in green and gold. The few people who came to call expressed satisfaction with the good taste displayed in this room, and Alice held her head very high. The rest of the house was not furnished after any certain taste, or any given art period; it was slightly bare, scarcely comfortable, and very higgledy-piggledy; but the young Morgans were satisfied, they were already acquiring a taste for show, not comfort.

Morgan went regularly to his work; he was clever enough, and his employers were pleased with him. Thus for a time the sun of prosperity shone upon the family—but only for a time; like a ship, without

ballast, rudder, or compass, such was Morgan's moral nature. On coming to Manchester he had firmly resolved to turn over a new leaf, but he had never reckoned on the strength of long-acquired habits. Brought once more under their influence, his own strength, for he sought no other, proved itself utter weakness. The temptations which had assailed him in London assailed him once more in Manchester. He joined wine parties, he lost not a little at play, he speculated—most doubtful were his speculations, and very seldom successful; thus penury, which might have been kept at bay, appeared once more, gaunt and grim, on the threshold of the Morgans' home, and the sun went slowly down amid dark and lowering clouds.





CHAPTER XVIII.

A PROMISE.

HESTER'S boy was six months old before the return tide of perplexity visited her. The link between her and her husband seemed at this time complete, there was no discordance, no jar, and had there been, one glance at the face of their lovely boy must have chased it away.

Andrew, it is true, was prouder of his wife than of his son, but the satisfaction he felt in both was perfect. Thus the affectionate part of his nature was called into play, and its influence was vaguely felt through his writings at this time; his sarcasms became fewer and less severe, while the broad spirit of love for all humanity became visible under his words.

The man was very happy, and happiness agreed with him, bringing out all the finest and best points in his character.

Hester too lived in sunshine; her affectionate heart had food for its love—her own husband, her own child eclipsed the earlier loves. She thought less and less of her people; her heart was filled, and her cup was a cup of joy.

Yes, the Harvey's sun was shining brightly, but whatever the wise reason, such sunshine never lasts

long in this world ; the law of trial is the law of life ; and whether it learns the lessons meant for it to learn or not, poor human nature must go through some storms, some cloudy days, some times of rain and tempest.

The first sign of these troublous hours came to Hester in a letter from Manchester. The letter arrived at breakfast time ; little Andrew sat on his father's knee, crowed merrily, and played with him while Hester read.

Her correspondent was her mother. Mrs. Morgan wrote seldom, and never cheerfully ; hers was a nature that must turn to the dark side, and when Hester saw the handwriting she expected nothing very bright and cheery. But, as she read, a shadow crept over her face ; the letter was indeed gloomy, but there was a reality in the gloom. Money was very short ; Mrs. Morgan did not know why, but they seemed to be as badly off as they ever were in Varley Street ; the father would not give an account of anything, he seemed morose and miserable ; she did not think he was giving satisfaction to his employers, and he was seldom, either night or day, at home !

This lamentation occupied the earlier portion of the letter, but the real trouble came later, the real trouble was Rupert.

Here the mother's heart spoke, and her words became genuine and pathetic. There was something wrong with Rupert ; there was some mystery about him which she could neither understand nor fathom. He came home regularly enough ; there were no complaints of him from head-quarters, but that there was something weighing on the boy's mind was most evident. He ate next to nothing, he was growing thinner and thinner, he scarcely ever spoke, he was morose and savage when addressed, and once, to the consternation of everybody,

he burst into tears. Mrs. Morgan had begged of him to confide in her. He had repulsed her with the rudest of words.

What was the matter? Was Rupert going mad? He had always been a queer boy. Oh, if only Hetty was there to counsel and advise him! She alone of all the family had ever had any influence over him.

"See, see, wife," sounded Andrew's voice, playful and joyous on her ear, "the little man has another tooth—see!"

Hester threw down her letter, left her place at the head of the table, and came to her husband's side. She did not even look at her laughing boy, who sprang up in his father's arms to welcome her.

Laying her two hands on Andrew's shoulder, she spoke in the old impulsive tones.

"Husband, there is bad news from home. I must go home at once."

"Bad news in that letter?" said Andrew. "Show it to me. You take baby while I read it, darling."

She walked to the window with her boy, while Andrew read. The contents of the letter could scarcely please him, but neither did they awaken fear. He saw very little to alarm any one under Mrs. Morgan's words; he ascribed them indeed to a woman's weak fancy. The part he disliked most was that which related to Morgan; he inwardly voted Morgan a scoundrel, but the boy—what boy that ever lived did not sometimes get into the blues!

The question, however, was not how to treat the Morgans—for them indeed he cared nothing—but how to soothe and please the wife of his heart, the mother of his son.

Hester had behaved—well—nobly about her people; he had not been insensible to the sacrifice she had

made for him on their account ; he must try to please her now.

Not for worlds would he allow her to go to Manchester ; that would be once more to throw her into that sea of discord and low-bred cares, to enlist her once more as a champion for those from whom he wished to divide her. No, she must on no account go to Manchester ; but town was very empty, the season was nearly over, Staunton was away, Mrs. Claymore was away—he might please his wife in another and a better manner. He went up to the window where she stood, put his arm round her waist, and kissed little Andrew.

“There is not much the matter with that brother of yours, Hester ; he is simply in the blues like many another lad. What he wants is change ; I will write to-day to his chief, whom I know, and beg for a fortnight’s holiday for him, and then you can have him up here on a visit—eh, wife ?”

“Here, on a visit ?” answered Hester, “here ! May I ?”

“Of course you may. That will be much better than going down there. I will write about him this very day, and you shall give him the invitation at once. Does that satisfy you, dearest ?”

He looked at her eagerly. Her face flushed up ; for a brief half-instant she had certainly pictured showing little Andrew to her mother, but this permission to have her brother at her own house pleased and astonished her.

“Thank you, husband,” she said, “I will write to Rupert at once ; it will give me great happiness to have him here.”

The invitation to Rupert was dispatched. Three or four days went by, and two letters from Manchester awaited Mrs. Harvey.

She opened her brother's first. It was short, the writing straggling and irregular; its contents ran thus—

DEAR HESTER,—No doubt my mother has been sermonising about me—hence the gracious invitation from you, and your lord and master. With my best thanks, I beg to assure you both that it has come a little too late; time was—but never mind!

I'm not coming to town at present; I don't intend to visit you. It may be necessary for me to speak to you at a future date; when that hour arrives I *will* speak, no matter who says me nay. Until then,

Believe me to be, your still very near relation,

RUPERT MORGAN.

P.S.—To relieve your mind to a certain extent concerning myself, I beg to assure you that my present moroseness is not caused by any conduct of my own, but from certain discoveries which I am making with regard to another individual in whom we both, whether we like it or not, are obliged to take an interest.

Hester read through this letter without either exclamation or comment. A second lay on her plate; she broke the seal and read it slowly.

The second letter was from Morgan himself. Here the writing, in contradistinction to Rupert's, was neat and careful. It began in terms of endearment.

MY DARLING CHILD,—I write in difficulty, and yet with hope, for I am appealing to the daughter who has never failed me. I am not a man of many words, but I am not ungrateful for all that my Hetty has done for her old father.

To you and your husband I owe the comfortable situation I now possess.

We are all doing very well here, Hester; we are comfortable, we are surrounded by the refinements of life; it is a shadow of the old days, my dear, when your mother and I possessed more money than even you and your worthy husband can now call your own. We owe our comforts to you and him, and whenever you choose to visit Manchester, we will endeavour to show you both that we are not ungrateful.

My dear, I know your good heart, and I write now to beg for a little favour; it is small, but the need is pressing. Hester, I want the loan of a hundred pounds by return of post. I want it badly. I need

scarcely say that my child will not fail me here. This trifling sum is imperatively necessary. Ask your husband for it, and send it *without fail*.

Ever, my guardian angel, your truly affectionate father,

JOHN MORGAN.

P.S.—I write in haste to catch this post. On the receipt of the money I will let you know why I demand it. Trifling as it is, my need for it is *very* pressing.

When Hester had read these letters she locked them into her secretary and went out, taking little Andrew and his nurse with her. She went into the Green Park, sat down on one of the benches, and took her child on her knee.

The dark speaking eyes of the lovely child gazed into hers; she answered back their look, trying to read in their innocent, wondering world, an answer to the problem which perplexed her. The baby's eyes were not unlike her brother's; in the round, happy face she could even trace a fancied resemblance to him. Would the baby ever grow up to fling such burning, passionate words in her face as Rupert had done to-day? The mere suggestion caused her to press him to her breast in an agony. She then gave him back to his nurse and walked home alone.

In the evening she showed the two letters to her husband. She had thought of keeping back Rupert's, but her later considerations made her resolve to let him read it. In truth she loved him too well to have any thought, even a thought of pain, apart from him. She gave the bleared and ill-written epistle to her husband with the words—

"I am ashamed of it. It has pained me much. I fail to understand it."

Andrew treated this boyish letter much as he had done a former one from the same writer—he tossed it from him with a careless laugh.

"When a young cub—pardon me, Hester, he really behaves as one—gets into the sulks, the only remedy is to let him alone."

Then he kissed his wife, who handed him the other letter. Over this letter, strange to say, Hester had wasted few thoughts. Her father wanted money—a loan of money. Since her marriage Hester's own money necessities had been so liberally supplied that she had ceased to value money at its true worth. Her husband was very rich, and very generous—of course he would lend her father this money without a moment's hesitation.

She was rather astonished, however, to see the look on his face as he read Morgan's letter; he drew in his breath, a slight flush rose to his brow; finally, he jumped up hastily, and, taking the letter with him, went out of the room. The fact was, he wanted to decide on some mode of action before he met his wife's eyes. The whole tone of Morgan's letter displeased him; he saw the meanness of the man's nature in every word. Read by the light this letter threw on it, he began to perceive some meaning in Rupert's sulks. Rupert's epistle was a thousand times more agreeable to him than the fawning words of the elder man. Strange to say, he had that very day heard one or two things about Morgan's London life, which made him feel almost certain that the money he now needed was for no worthy object. Should he, could he aid and abet him in some scheme, perhaps some scheme of sin? But for his wife's sake he would have refused the loan utterly; indeed, in any case, to begin lending money to a man such as Morgan was contrary to his ideas of prudence. But for his wife's sake—he would do a great deal for his wife—for her dear sake, he would look more closely into this unpleasant matter, and if the need were a genuine one he would supply it. He went back to Hester. He was

a good deal disturbed, and his words were perhaps a trifle harsh.

"I don't like this letter," he said. "I don't like either its tone or its demand. Hester, you must write to your father, and at once. This is what you must tell him. Say to him, Hester, that you have shown his letter to your husband, that you have no money in your own possession to lend him; but as, what is your husband's is yours, you believe you can let him have one hundred pounds, on one condition—that he explains satisfactorily to your husband his need of it. When your husband is really satisfied on this point the money shall be forthcoming."

Hester bit her lip, her voice trembled a little as she spoke.

"I," she began—"I can do without that dress for the fancy ball, and—and not go to the sea. Would not that nearly make up the money?"

Now she raised her eyes to her husband's appealingly.

Harvey took hold of her arm almost too firmly; he felt stern with her for so misunderstanding him.

"Wife," he said, "the money loan is nothing; twenty times that sum should be given in a cause of honour, but I have reasons. Write what I have told you, and look up at me, Hester, I am about to lay a command on you."

"I will obey you," she said.

"This is my desire, Hester—listen. I, your husband, forbid you, under *any circumstance*, to lend money, without my permission, to your father. Do you promise again to obey me?"

"Yes," she answered, but she burst into tears; her heart was full of perplexity and pain.



CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT IT INVOLVED.

IT was one of those dreary, wet, wet days that come in summer ; muddy, as in winter, were the streets ; slipshod and dreary looked the passengers under their dripping umbrellas.

A train puffed slowly into Euston Station, letting off its steam into the steamy atmosphere.

The occupants of the many carriages got out, hailed to porters, collected their luggage, and drove off in different directions in cabs. Cabs were in demand, and some passengers had to go away on foot.

A man who had travelled up third class and without luggage was one of the first to jump into a hansom, give a hurried order, and drive rapidly away. He was well wrapped up in an overcoat, the collar of which he had slouched over his ears ; the overcoat was, in itself, a good one, but either its peculiar set, or the outline of its wearer's figure under it, proclaimed seediness, as did also the glimpse that could be seen of the face—white, drawn, and anxious—which was visible above the collar of the coat.

The cab drew up with a sudden jerk at No. 20, Walter Street, and John Morgan got out, rang the bell, and asked for his daughter. She was in—he gave no name, but requested to be taken into her

presence at once. The servant hesitated, but obeyed him.

Morgan was taken upstairs into the pretty drawing-room where Hester sat.

She had been thinking of him, and her cheeks were wet with some tears.

He took off his hat, pulled down his overcoat, and advanced to meet her; she sprang up, and was locked in his arms. As he folded his arms round her, he trembled; she felt his agitation, and ascribed it to his joy at seeing her.

She had been sadly perplexed about him—she had been anxious and miserable. The letter her husband had dictated to her seemed to her a cruel letter; it seemed cruel, it seemed scarcely dutiful, for the child to drag from the parent the reason for a sudden and pressing need.

Many of the feelings which had been hers a year ago, and which had slept in her late happy life until she believed them dead, were again awakened.

The fact was, hers was a woman's heart, narrow in its judgment from the intensity of its love. She judged both her husband and her father wrongly.

Since the writing of her letter, she had thought of scarcely anything but her father's need; but now in the sudden joy of seeing him, she forgot even that—he was there himself. She felt like a child again, in his arms.

The old days, when the grave little maiden used to warm his slippers, and air his newspaper, and then climb on his knee for a story and a kiss, returned to her.

Only for an instant, only for the brief half-moment while his arms were round her, then he himself dispersed all early and holy memories.

He had embraced her with warmth, now he pushed her from him.

"Hester, is your husband in?"

"No," she answered, "he will be home at seven, to dinner."

"Seven!" echoed Morgan, "that is good; it is only two o'clock now. Hetty, I must speak to you alone, and at once—at once; is there any private room where we could talk without being disturbed?"

"Will you not have something to eat first, father?" she asked, alarmed by his words and wild manner.

"Eat! no, it would choke me. I am in sore need—I want your help. Shall I talk to you here?"

"No; we will go to my husband's study," said Hester. She led the way there at once.

As they entered the room, a ray of sunshine was falling on the face of one of Guido's most glorious and suffering saints.

The swift glance she got of that true nobility, patented by suffering, was graven in ever afterwards on the heart of the wife and daughter.

Morgan locked the door, then, turning suddenly, he took both her hands.

"Child, do you love me?" he said.

"You know it, father," she answered; but she looked up at him in dismay—she had never seen him like this before.

"Then you will help me in my need?" said Morgan.

"This is the hour for deeds, not words. I have had many words from you, I now ask for action, immediate and strong. I got your humbugging letter—it was not *your* letter at all, it was your husband's. I answer it in person; I have come for the money. I want the money at once—this instant."

"Andrew will give it to you when he comes in," said Hester. "He will be at home for dinner, and will give it to you when you have told him what you want it for. I was sorry to have to write to you like that, father,

but my husband has a prejudice against lending money to any one, except on strictly business terms."

"I cannot wait for your husband—I don't want to see him. I must return to Manchester by the four o'clock train. Give me the money at once, Hester!"

"Father, dear, I have not got it. If you must go back by that train, could you not go to my husband in the City? Oh! what is the matter? What has happened? I never saw you look like that."

Nor had she; for at that moment the good spirit and the bad, so long fighting for the mastery in this man's nature, had come to a decisive issue. The good had departed—the bad reigned triumphant.

"Never mind what is the matter," said Morgan. "You can help me—you can save me. I have no time to go to your husband—I don't want to go to your husband. You have a cheque-book—give me a cheque."

"I cannot," she began.

"Have you a cheque-book?"

"Yes—but—but, oh! father, have pity on me. I cannot wrong my husband, even for you."

"What do you mean? I ask for the loan of a hundred pounds, how does that wrong him?"

"Yes; but the money, strictly speaking, is his—and I promised—he does not wish me to lend money—I promised I would not."

"I see! You promised you would not lend it to me; is that true? You would not lend it to me, your father! Speak, child."

"I promised," said Hester, covering her face.

"I see," answered Morgan again; he left her side and walked to the window. He was, in truth, a desperate man, and desperate must be his last resource.

He had been haunted by evil, he had followed evil, and evil had dragged him to the edge of this present

gulf. Standing by the window, he looked into the gulf he had dug for himself and shuddered—shuddered at the depth of the abyss caused by his own sins and weaknesses. There was nothing now left for him to do but to kill the love of his child, to give her a glimpse into his own fallen nature. He was not wholly lost yet, and he trembled at this, for he valued Hester's love; she had hitherto been, in very truth, his guardian angel.

The knowledge of her pure love, the feeling that she thought him good, and capable of goodness, had kept him from many a sinful deed, had kept alive in him some remnants of self-respect. Now he was about to sever this anchor of his soul, to cut in two this chain.

He turned round—he had been fierce and peremptory, but now he was humble; he took Hester's hands, bowed his head over them, and burst into tears.

"Hetty," he began, "Hetty—I am a miserable, miserable, lost man. Hetty—child, child—I dare not tell your husband. Hetty—I have sinned—I have sinned."

"Tell me, father," she said; she bent down over his bowed grey head, and kissed it. As yet, indeed, she failed to comprehend him; as yet her feelings were those of pity, heightened to anguish.

"Poor father!" she repeated; "tell me—tell me of your trouble."

"Yes, Hester," continued Morgan, raising his head and speaking more quietly, "I must tell you all. I know what you have thought of me; I know what you will think of me—but, no matter. Hester, I tell you alone, for you, I know, will never betray me, and you, if you will, can save me."

Hester was silent.

"You thought me a good man long ago," continued Morgan, "perhaps—who knows, you have thought me

a good man up to this present moment? Well—no matter—you were mistaken. I was not good—I was not worthy of you. I was always a little weak; even when I was young and prosperous. It was a great trial to me losing all that money—people looked down on me, and ceased to respect me. I could not quite bear that; at first I was indifferent, then I got angry and reckless; I lost, in a great measure, my own self-respect. I grew indifferent to life—I despaired of ever climbing up the hill again, and I got among a bad, low lot. They tempted me. I was surrounded by sin, and I yielded to sin. I did little things—not very, very bad—not punishable by law—done by heaps of other men, and thought nothing of, but still that my own father and mother would have wept about, had they known. I was aware of this, and yet I did them. I need not tell you what they were, Hetty—except one: I began to play heavily for money. This is a passion that grows on a man. I lost and won—lost and won. I used to flatter myself that I would bring my family back to wealth again; I used to delude my soul with this notion; but no matter. When I went to Manchester I resolved to turn over a new leaf. We could have lived comfortably on the income I now obtained, and I resolved to do so. I was a weak reed; I had no power over myself. Well, I can tell you in a few words. I gambled again; I gambled for larger sums; I lost and won. A night arrived when I lost all. I was indeed in despair. I had not a penny in the world. I dared not complain, for I was supposed to draw a good income; and did my employers know that I gambled, they would no longer allow me to retain my situation. Hester, dark, mad temptations came to me—and I yielded to them. Large sums of money belonging to my employers were daily passing through my hands. I took one hundred pounds, meaning to double it at

play and return it. If returned in a week from the time it was taken, the loan—for it was only a loan—would never be discovered. Of course my luck was against me; of course I lost all. If that money is not returned by to-morrow morning, all will be discovered, and I and mine will be ruined—lost utterly.”

Morgan paused. He had spoken with his head down. He looked up now for a reply. Hester made none.

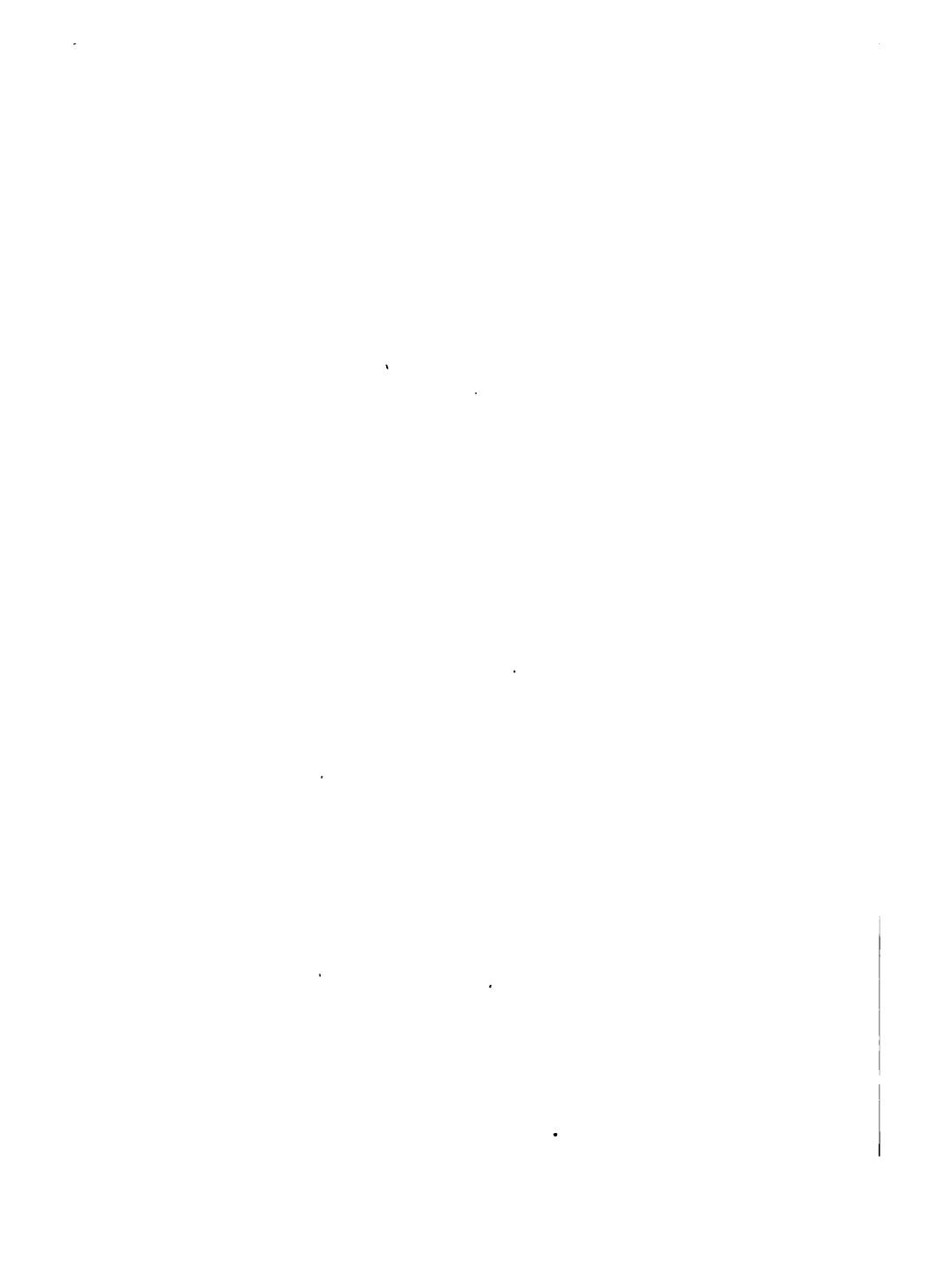
“Don’t reproach me,” he began. “Think what you like, but don’t waste time in words: there is none to lose. If I do not catch that train, I shall not be able to replace the money. Give me a cheque at once, and let me go, Hester.”

“I cannot do that,” answered Hester. “I—I will not desert you; I will try to save you. I will go at once to my husband, and tell him all; I will plead with him. I don’t know the result; but I will try and bring you back the money. Wait for me; wait here until I return.”

She was about to leave the room, but Morgan stood before the door and intercepted her.

“You cannot do what you propose,” he began. “Your husband would not pity me. Only a child’s love can save a man in a need such as mine. Your husband must never know what I have told you, Hester—never. Besides, there is not time to go to him. I repeat that I must catch that train. No; either you give me the money or refuse to give it to me; either ruin me or save me. But let me know at once; for if you refuse I will resort to other means. God knows what *they* are. Hester”—taking out his watch—“I give you ten minutes: in ten minutes I must leave this house.”

“Oh, I am perplexed,” answered Hester, pressing her hand to her head; “I am utterly perplexed. Oh,





"Morgan removed ten notes."

how can I ruin you?—how can I save you? Give me five minutes. Let me go away by myself for five minutes.”

Morgan opened the door for her at once, and she went out.

He paced up and down the room. He took out his watch. How long those moments seemed, while his fate trembled in the balance.

Suppose Hester refused his request; and—he knew her character well—she was very likely to refuse. As the wretched man paced up and down the room, Satan accompanied him, paused with him, thought with him, then suddenly brought all his influence to bear to induce him to yield to a fresh temptation.

A key was in a secretary; through some accident it had been left there. The sun, which still lingered in the room, lit up the bright steel of the little key. Morgan saw it; he marked the secretary; it was a place where money was very likely to be kept. He took out his watch; three minutes still remained before Hester would return. He opened the secretary. In the secretary lay a pocket-book; inside the pocket-book was a roll of Bank of England notes. Morgan removed ten notes for ten pounds each, and placed them in his own inner pocket.

Then he snatched up a sheet of paper and wrote hastily, with a pencil, the following words:—

You might have refused, so I have taken the money. Tell your husband you gave it to me, and thus save us all.

He twisted up the note, directed it to Hester, re-locked the secretary, and glided noiselessly out of the house.





CHAPTER XX.

“WHAT MADE ALL THE MUSIC MUTE.”

AT the end of five minutes Hester returned to the library. No fulness of either thought or pain had come to her, this was the hour for action. She had returned resolved to act. Her good angel was with her; she had resolved to act aright. She would give her father no money without her husband's permission. In short, she had resolved to keep true to her own word. She saw indeed not an inch before her; but her instinct bent her towards the right. She looked around her in astonishment; her father was gone. Had he read her resolve even before it was spoken? Had he been a little bit true to the instincts of a father and determined to tempt her no longer? This idea came to her with a sense of strong relief; then she saw his note—she sat down and opened it. She read the short note very slowly; once, twice, even thrice, did her eyes peruse it; at the third reading its meaning became quite clear to her mind and intellect, but even then her heart had quite failed to take it in. There was a little noise in the hall; it was the nurse talking to her baby. She jumped up at once, and ran out to meet him; she took him in her arms and kissed him and laughed with him and played for a moment or two with him. He was looking lovely, and she felt quite able to admire his beauty and to

rejoice in the fact that he was hers. Then she returned once more to the library, and sat down helplessly on the first chair that came in her way.

Her father's note was crushed up in her palm, she had clutched her hand tightly over it; now she drew her chair to the table and spread out the note before her. She read it again and yet again. How short it was, and yet how pregnant with awful meaning! "*I took the money*," this was the sentence she comprehended first. She writhed in body as well as in mind over these words. Her father was a thief; he had robbed his employers first, and then he had robbed his child, his children. Her father! no, no, no, *not* her father, not the man she had loved and venerated, not the father who had played with her as a little child, not the man to whom she owed her being! No, it was *not* her father. Some one else had taken her beloved father's name—it was not, it could not be he.

Now the floodgates of her anguish gave way, and she wept, oh! such bitter tears. She felt that she was weeping for the dead; she almost believed that a fiend had come in her father's name, had put on her father's form, and had tempted her with horrible, horrible things. In truth the passionate human heart was weeping over a broken idol.

The nursery was over the library, and she heard her child's merry prattling voice upstairs; this sound, the sound of her baby's merry laugh, aroused her, but it also awoke in her a fresh train of thought.

She was an unselfish woman, and hitherto her grief had been unselfish. She had been mourning for the departed good; but now, with her baby's laugh, other feelings awoke in her breast—feelings of shame for her and hers. Her innocent boy was disgraced, she was disgraced, her husband was disgraced. The thought of this disgrace was odious to her, it came to her in the

form of the keenest pain. Thus, with her heart weakened and her spirit crushed, temptation visited her.

She raised her head, and, through her swimming tears, read the second part of Morgan's note.

"Tell your husband that you gave me the money, and thus save us all."

What did it mean? Did he, the man who had sinned, who had fallen, suppose that she would tell a *lie*, that she would keep a secret from her husband, from the one she loved best in the world? Low indeed must be his nature, when he supposed she would act like this. But he was not her father. No, no. And yet, what folly was this! He *was* her father—her father, who had disgraced them all.

Then temptation came to her in a more subtle form—came to her through and in her love.

Could any amount of sin separate a man from his child? Could any circumstance, however dreadful, separate her from little Andrew? No: they were mother and child. And she—she and this sinful man were father and child; nothing could divide the God-given relationship.

He had said to her, "Don't tell your husband. In a strait like this only the love of a child can save a man." Suppose she did save him—not from his sin, that was done, the sin was sinned, but from the consequences of his sin. Suppose she did not tell Andrew; suppose she kept from him the dark story which Morgan had told her, and allowed him to believe that she had given her father the money. She could let him imagine that it was to supply a necessity—a lawful necessity—not to keep at bay the penalty of a sin. The temptation pressed upon her—growing feasible—growing tangible. Would it not, after all, be the right thing, the kind thing, to do? Andrew would indeed reproach her for her broken promise, and his reproach would be hard, hard to bear—but not so hard as the look of anguish on

his proud face, did he learn the truth. Andrew—upright, honourable, the proud son of a proud race—how could he bear the knowledge that his wife's father was a gambler and a thief? And how she had praised this father! How she had spoken to her husband of his virtues and good qualities, and felt almost indignant at his not responding more warmly to her words! What pain she had felt when her people were sent to Manchester! She had felt much indignation then with her Andrew for what she considered over-fastidiousness, for not taking them all to his heart; for were they not true, and good, and dear? and were not these qualities far above either education or noble birth? But *was* her father good? Was he indeed a fit companion for her noble-minded husband? She had dreamed a dream about her father: it had proved itself but a dream: he was not the man she thought him. No, no; her husband must not learn this story; the dark fact she had become acquainted with this day she must keep to herself.

Alas, alas! poor wife and daughter! poor torn and perplexed heart!—she yielded to the temptation. She lit a taper, and held her father's note in it until it was burned to ashes. Then she sat down and wrote a swift line, which she took out and posted herself. These were the words which Morgan received by the first post the next morning:—

DEAR FATHER,—I will save you.—Your child,

HETTY.

After posting this letter Hester dressed for dinner. She used to dress early, and then used to play with her boy until her husband's return. This evening she put on a white dress, but instead of going into the nursery went downstairs.

She hardly acknowledged to herself that she was

about to commit sin; but she had a feeling which caused her to avoid her baby's eyes. Her heart felt stunned, cold, and dead; but her conscience did not trouble her; she believed that she was doing right. Andrew came in as usual: he was hungry and cheerful.

During dinner Hester returned his smiles and entered into his conversation. When the cloth was removed, the dessert on the table, and the servant gone, she rose at once and went to his side.

Hitherto, in any of her confidences, she had nestled close to him, sometimes with one arm round his neck. Now she stood erect, in all the dignity of her noble height.

"Husband," she said, "I have something to tell you."

"Well," he answered, looking up at her lazily and cheerfully.

"My father was here to-day."

At these words her face grew very pale—white to the very lips; the lips themselves trembled.

Andrew, quick to detect emotion on that changeful countenance, now roused himself; he stretched out his hand to draw his wife to sit on his knee.

Hester appeared not to see the hand—she still stood erect before him.

"Your father!" said Andrew—"he came up about the money, I suppose? What explanation did he give, dear?"

"He—he wanted the money very badly, Andrew."

"Oh, yes, of course. Did he tell you what for?"

Hester was silent.

"What is the matter with you, wife?—you look strange: and where is your father?—is he in town?—is he coming to see me this evening?"

"No; he has gone back to Manchester."

"What! without the money he came up about?—that, indeed, is incomprehensible."

"He has the money," answered Hester.

"He has what money?—what do you mean?"

"He has your money, husband. His need was very sore, too great to be delayed for your return. He has the hundred pounds—he has gone back to Manchester with it."

While uttering these words Hester's eyelids had drooped, now she raised them with a swift glance.

Andrew had risen to his feet. He was a head taller than her; he stood looking at her, but not offering to touch her. He had the kind of eyes—changeable and emotional—which can flash out intense scorn at times; such a glance did Hester now receive. She saw it; it went straight, like a sword, through her heart, but she did not falter; on the contrary, it seemed to give her courage, for she now fully answered his gaze. For a full moment, perhaps two, Harvey did not say a word, then he continued—

"Your father told you what his need was?"

"Yes," answered Hester.

"Am I to hear the tale?"

"It is a secret—it is only for me."

"Ah!" said Harvey. He sat down again in his chair, some emotion had seized him; he covered his face with his hands; his hands trembled.

Still Hester stood erect. She felt as if something was turning her into stone; she could neither weep, entreat, nor pray.

"You gave him the money. Where did you get it?" asked her husband after a pause.

"You left the key in your secretary—there were bank-notes in your pocket-book."

"Yes; I remember."

Again he covered his face, and Hester stood before him. After a long, long pause she spoke, and now her voice had a quiver and was slightly broken.

"Husband, have you nothing to say to me?"

Andrew looked up at once.

"Not much," he answered. "I would remind you, were there any use in doing so, of a promise you once gave me. It was only a night or two ago, but women's memories are short. There is no use in talking about it. Good night. I have some articles to write, so do not sit up for me."

He neither kissed her nor looked at her, but went into the library, locking the door after him.





PART II.

CHAPTER XXI.

MOTHER AND CHILD.

IT was a summer's evening, an evening following a day of intense heat. In a rustic chair, under a wide-spreading beech-tree, sat a woman. She had on a light summer dress, and a black lace mantilla was wrapped partly about her head and about her shoulders. A book lay on the grass at her feet, also some articles of fancy needlework.

She herself was neither reading nor working—her whole attitude was one of intense watchfulness. She held one hand up to her chin, her eyes looked afar; you knew even without being told that she was listening for a very distant sound. It came nearer; she relaxed her intently watchful demeanour, smiled, and rose to her feet.

A rustling was heard in some shrubs, a merry, ringing laugh, and a boy of eight bounded to her side.

"Mother, mother, Joe is going to have some jolly fishing in the pond; may I go with him for a little bit?"

Eager eyes looked into hers, and rather dirty little hands clung to her white dress.

"For half an hour, darling," she answered. "Can you be back in half an hour?"

"If I must—must I?"

"Yes, your father will be home then. I want you to meet him."

"Oh!" a slightly blank look on the joyous face.

"Well, all right, mother, I'll be back in time. Good-bye."

He darted off, disappearing as quickly as he had come.

Hester Harvey sat down again and took up her book; she opened it at the marked passage, and read carefully for a few moments, then her attention appeared to wander, the book dropped to her lap, and she looked wistfully to the distance. A fair English landscape lay before her—to the right, a grand old house, many storied, many turreted, a house grey with age and picturesque with ivy; at her feet a smooth-shaven lawn—in the distance a park and river.

The colour in the sky blended harmoniously with the tints of the foliage, and not a leaf stirred. There was heard in the distance the singing of a bird or two, otherwise not a sound; peace and stillness everywhere, and the promise of a glorious sunset.

In the whole attitude of the quiet woman who gazed on this lovely scene there also seemed to be peace—the vivacious impulsive girl of nearly eight years ago seemed metamorphosed.

For the whole half-hour that her boy was away Hester sat without stirring—her book appeared to have lost its interest. Suddenly, breaking on the summer stillness, there came a quick, sharp sound, the sound of a horseman approaching rapidly; the colour flushed into the quiet woman's pale cheek, she rose to her feet at once,

and walked quickly down the avenue. The approaching sounds grew nearer, horse and rider appeared in view.

"Ah, Hester!" said her husband's voice. He alighted at once and walked by her side. She was pale again when she saw him; she laid her hand on his arm. He stooped down and kissed her, and they walked slowly up the long avenue together.

"I felt sure you would come home to-night, Andrew, even though you did not telegraph. You promised to send me a telegram, so I half expected it."

"Wise woman," answered her husband, "not to expect it wholly. I forgot all about it. Well, you see, I have turned up, even without that special messenger. I am thankful to say that I can stay down here until Monday. London is stifling—unendurable."

"Only until Monday, Andrew? I thought you could have given us a fortnight this lovely weather."

"Not I; had I considered my duties I should not have stirred from town; but the fact was, the prospect of a day's fishing was too much for me—I yielded to the temptation. No, no, there is no chance of any real holiday for me while Parliament sits; afterwards, indeed."

"Yes, afterwards," said Hester. She could not help the faintest tremble in her voice, and a look of eagerness in her eyes. "Afterwards," she said, looking into her husband's face.

"Afterwards," answered Andrew, "I think of going to Switzerland for a month. Staunton, Graham, and some other fellows are making up a party; I believe I shall join them. Have you ordered dinner, Hester? I hope so: I hate those early teas you women delight in."

"Yes, husband, it is all ready—and hark! there is the dressing gong."

"Well, let's come into the house: I own to a country appetite. How delicious the air of this place feels!"

He was the owner of the grand old place now, and he turned round for a moment to drink in some more of the sweet breeze, and to look around him. Hester also did the same. As they stood together on the steps there was heard again a rustling in the shrubs, the shouting and laughing of a young voice, and little Andrew, covered with mud, radiant and dirty, rushed across the lawn to meet them.

"What has the boy been doing with himself?" said Sir Andrew.

"Oh, mother, I fell into the pond; 'twas so jolly. I—I splashed up to my neck—oh! I say."

This last exclamation was addressed to his mother, but the object of it was evidently the tall father whose return he had not expected so soon.

"Go and speak to your father, my darling. Andrew, he is getting such a plucky little angler."

Sir Andrew laid his hand for an instant on the little head, with its clustering dark curls.

"That is right," he said; "when you have cleaned off all that mud, come and see me in the dining-room after dinner, lad." He turned on his heel and sauntered into the house.

Hester did not immediately follow. She stayed behind to strain the dirty little figure to her breast.





CHAPTER XXII.

THE YEARS THAT WERE GONE.

ON that night, nearly eight years ago, when Andrew Harvey parted from his wife in anger, dismay, and sorrow, a new era began in his own existence. Distrust commenced in his life ; it was a baleful weed ; it metamorphosed—in a great measure it metamorphosed the man.

After Hester's revelation to him he locked his study door, sat down by his writing-table, took out the magazine for which he was to write an article, studied his subject carefully, and commenced his theme. The article in question was to be in the printer's hands the next morning—he posted it that night. It was cleverly written, and met with applause ; it revealed new talents in the author, and opened up to him a series of fresh employments.

In this first article his own pungent and bitter feelings had found vent in sarcastic words. The fact was, the man's own strongest belief in good was shaken ; henceforth he ceased to preach good ; he ceased, unknown to himself, to advocate its cause. He revealed indeed abuses, he worried out cases of corruption, but he chose sarcasm for his weapon. In his skilful hands such a weapon became formidable. Harvey grew more and more popular as a writer.

On this first night of his new life, after he had posted his article, he returned again to his study, and sat down to think. His thoughts were horrible and perplexing, revolving ever round and round one orbit. Hester, his Hester, had broken her promise; she had broken a promise made solemnly to him, her husband.

Men like Harvey often place one woman on a pedestal and fall down and worship her. She represents perfection to the man who gives her this idolatry; he sees no flaw in her, she is his ideal.

A worldly minded man, for such was Harvey, will give this kind of worship and be benefited by it, so long as his idol is perfect; but, alas! when the clay appears in the golden image, when what he thought was a god appears in all the weakness of the human. In such weakness did the woman who had trembled before him that night appear.

The ideal Hester had vanished. He knew it. As he sat in his study, he trembled with rage, anguish, and dismay. It was too soon for him to see the beauty of the human heart, to acknowledge the intense tenderness of the human affection, to pity the suffering which had caused the sin. Of what use was the Human with its failings while he mourned for the Divine with its perfections?

After an hour or two of most bitter musing he rose to his feet; he resolved to resign himself to his fate. He would ask for no more explanations; explanations were useless. No explanations in all the world could mend the sacredness of the broken bond. Hester was like all women; all women were weak and—and false. Perhaps she was better than most; he had hitherto believed her quite different—altogether another order of creature. Well! no matter; he too had dreamt a false dream.

He intended to make no difference in his outward

manner to Hester. He believed himself quite capable of concealing all inward disappointment. He would be kind to her, he would try to be loving to her, for she was his wife; she was the mother of his boy; and *she*, poor thing! could not help the misfortune of being only a weak woman.

So the next morning he greeted her as usual; he kissed her and played with his boy. The dark rings round Hester's eyes startled him for a moment and smote on his heart, but he resolved to keep to the neutral ground which he had planned for himself, of no explanation. He could not hate Hester; indeed, in his heart of hearts he still loved her dearly, but all the hero-worship, all the early, lover-like regard, was gone. No, he could not hate his wife, but he *could* hate her family. The contempt he had hitherto felt for them was changed into this more active feeling.

It was with unfeigned delight—delight which he did not try to conceal, that he heard, a fortnight later, that Hester's father, mother, and brothers and sisters, were all about to emigrate to Canada, her father having raised money, no one quite knew how, for the purpose.

"I am glad of it," he said almost savagely. "I never could pretend to like the people—I am glad they mean to put the ocean between us."

And yet as he said the words, and looked at his wife's pale and suffering face, he felt that the ocean would not be put between him and the Morgans. One would remain; one he could not part from. Hitherto he had considered Hester as something apart from her family, he now believed her to be one of them. Again he tried to soften his own hard thoughts with the inward comment—

"She cannot help her birth, poor thing!—she is not to blame for her low origin."

But in what measure does contempt soften bitterness?

One fortnight ~~had~~ made the man strangely hard—and he knew it. His ~~efforts~~ to appear the same had failed—he could but wrap his feelings in a mantle of reserve.

And now—his heart's ~~deepest~~ affections being turned from his wife, would have ~~centred~~ on his little son, but for one most strange coincidence. The boy resembled neither his father nor mother, but possessed a fugitive, changing, and yet most real likeness, to Hester's brother Rupert. Rupert possessed a peculiar face; little Andrew inherited all these peculiarities: just the same rather sunken dark eyes; just the same mould of chin and brow; the same dark, wild, luxuriant hair. There was a fitful light, almost lurid, which came and went in Rupert Morgan's face. It flashed in the little one's—flashed and came. He was a boy of strong passions, of imperious will. In these passions, in the exercise of this will, he was Rupert Morgan over again. He was handsomer than his uncle—his figure was altogether different, built on the strong, square mould of the Harvey race, but in his face he was a Morgan. It seemed to Harvey that this likeness grew in little Andrew, from the moment that his ideal Hester had fallen. When he took the boy in his arms, and tried to play with him, he was startled by the look which he hated on the handsome little face. It seemed to come for him alone, for the next moment, as the child sat on his mother's knee, it appeared to have vanished.

Thus the love he would have otherwise felt for his only child was checked; that singular likeness was disagreeable to him, reminding him of the causes that made his marriage commonplace, every day; severing it altogether from the ideal marriage of which he had dreamt.

This slackening of the home affections round his heart was bad for the man—working in him a slow but sure change. Outsiders only noticed it as the years

went by, only noticed it then in a certain hardness of manner, in the added sarcasm of his really powerful writing: they said, "He is growing older; he is seeing life as it is." They never guessed that life as it really is, with its thousand beauties and tendernesses, was fading from the man's vision; that he was gliding slowly but surely into the dark and misty regions of scepticism, unbelief, and hardness of heart.

God, as He *can* reveal himself to a man, had never yet visited Harvey; but He had come in the face of wife and child, and when he turned away from these, he also turned away from God.

Five years passed away thus, and then a change came in Harvey's outward circumstances—the old baronet died, and Claughtonville, with its fine rental and title, became his. They came with a shock, and a sense of keen pain and loss—for now he believed that he loved no one as he loved his old father.

After his first visit, immediately after Harvey's marriage, the old man had not again visited London; but he constantly sent for his son, and always on these occasions Hester and the boy accompanied Andrew to Claughtonville.

Sir Andrew was very fond of Hester, and took great delight in the little dark gipsy lad, who, if he lived, would one day bear his name and title. Sir Andrew was distressed by no unpleasant likeness in his grandson; he said he had the Harvey figure, and was rather proud of his bold, dark face.

The fearless boy delighted the old man with his tricks and vagaries. He allowed him to take unheard-of liberties with him—to climb on his knee, to ride on his shoulder. He used to pace up and down the sunny south walk often for hours in this manner, and his pride and pleasure in the handsome little lad even brought out some answering pleasure in

the younger Andrew's face. But the end came unexpectedly—for Sir Andrew was a hale old man almost to the last.

A sudden telegram brought Andrew, Hester, and the boy in haste to Claughtonville. The old man was dying, but they were in time to see him die. He spoke some farewell words to his son, he kissed and blessed little Andrew, then looking into Hester's eyes, some sudden longing came over him and he sent the others away.

"I want to say a word to my daughter," he said, "and I should like to say it alone—leave us, every one, for a little."

When the others had gone, he took Hester's hand and spoke.

"My child," he said, "I once gave you some counsel, and you followed me; I never counselled you again, for it is not good for any one to come often between a man and his wife; but I have watched your face, and I have watched Andrew's face. Hester, you and your husband are not what you were to each other—you love each other still, but there is a cloud between you."

"There is," answered Hester, falling on her knees and covering her face, "there is a heavy cloud between us."

"Who put it there, you or he?"

"I did; it is my fault alone."

"Can you not remove it, now, before I die?"

"I cannot," answered Hester, weeping. "I would give worlds to, but I am powerless. To remove it would involve others; it must remain."

Sir Andrew was silent for a moment, then he spoke.

"Hester, can you not confide in a dying man? I may counsel you; and your secret is safe in my grave."

Hester's face flushed brightly for one half-instant—she thought she could; then the shame of it, the

infinite disgrace of it, came over her. No, no; she must not speak of this secret, even to dying ears.

"I would give worlds to tell you," she said, "but I must not; I dare not. For the cloud between me and my husband, the cloud placed between us by myself, could only be removed by the betrayal of one of my own people. God knows I am a weak and sinful woman; but I cannot, I cannot betray my own."

"My dear," said Sir Andrew, "even though you cannot confide in me, do not suppose there is no way out of your trouble. A dying man, just at the end of this life, just at the close of the journey, during which he has met with a few storms and a cross or two—not many or great, but just enough to show him what they are like—this dying man points you to the good God, Hester Harvey. Long ago He took all my boys from me, and the wife I loved; but now I can only sing of His goodness, and rejoice. Go to Him, Hester, go and tell Him your trouble, He will show you a way out of it."

"I do not know Him," whispered Hester. "He seems such a stranger to me."

"Poor child! and He knows you so well. Talk to Him for half an hour, and you will find how much He knows about you. Go to Him—go to Him."

These were the last words Sir Andrew ever spoke—he died that night; and shortly afterwards, Andrew, Hester, and the boy took up their abode at Claughtonville. The London house was still kept on; but Hester went less and less to town, preferring, as her boy grew older, the country life and the quiet country ways. Except for a fortnight or a month at a time, she lived altogether at Claughtonville.

Andrew never pressed for her company; he had a seat in the House, and was more and more a busy man. So the years went by.



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE YEARS THAT WERE GONE (*continued*).

AND Hester—Hester herself. At the age of eight-and-twenty, Hester Harvey was a quiet, rather pale woman. The brilliant colouring of her early youth was gone. She was scarcely disimproved in appearance, though her roses had left her, and her golden sunny hair was some shades less bright. Her eyes, however, always dark and earnest, had some added depths in them—some new expressions—some new knowledge, which gave a charm to her face it had never possessed long ago. She was a dignified, graceful woman, much admired by those who knew her slightly—no one in the world, little Andrew excepted, now knew her well. But while the neighbours admired and praised Lady Harvey they wondered what sorrow had come to one so outwardly prosperous—for only sorrow could bring that look to her face. They were right; only sorrow could have done it, and sorrow the most exquisite to a nature such as hers—the sorrow caused by a sin. The high-minded, lofty nature had stooped to cowardice and falsehood; a great calamity had overtaken her—in her sudden terror and dismay she had sought to escape from it by these dark by-roads.

The moment her husband had left her on that terrible night she knew what she had done—she knew what her

sin really was. The sinner was in anguish and dismay, for she saw no door of repentance; though she sought it carefully and with tears. Confess—confess? she would confess all night long if it would do any good—if it would take away that look of anguish from her husband's face—if it would bring them both back to the old happy confidences. But to confess now would but involve the breaking of other promises; to confess now would be but to betray her father, her wretched, criminal father, whom Andrew in his just anger might prosecute and put in prison.

Thus her father would be convicted through her means of a double crime. And suppose she went now to her husband's door, and prayed for admittance, and told him that strange story, might he not disbelieve her? might he not say, "You, who were capable of telling one lie, of breaking one promise, are you not capable of breaking another?—are you not telling me this horrible and improbable tale now to divert my anger from yourself?"

Hester believed that such words might drop from her husband's lips, for since she had been capable of falsehood, she felt her own nature so dreadful to herself that she believed in the justice of the most severe condemnation. No; she had been afraid to trust Andrew—she had shielded her father with falsehood. Having gone over to his side she must abide there. Hester had not her husband's intellectual powers, but she had a woman's heart and a woman's keen perceptions, and she soon discovered what Andrew tried to hide, the total change in his regard.

When he spoke to her the next morning she detected the absence of affection in the usual words; when he looked at her she saw no love in the glance. She was not surprised, she was not angry, she accepted the change in her husband's manner as the just punishment

of her sin ; but as time went on, and she perceived that Andrew not only turned away from her, but also ceased to give her boy all that a father should give, then her sore heart began to stir with a feeling of secret rebellion. That he should not love her as he once did seemed fair enough ; but the little lad—the only son, the heir to his name and title—that he, her darling, should suffer a loss which no one could repair ; that he, so innocent, should be punished, seemed to her too hard. She began to murmur against God. She said, “ My sin is great, but it deserves not this heavy chastisement.”

Harvey's indifference to little Andrew would have surely alienated Hester's heart from him, and perhaps, after the first sharp struggle, have caused her to suffer less—but for a trivial circumstance. She saw her husband's name heading a new review. She had heard Staunton and other men talk of this periodical not altogether with approval. She was startled to find that Andrew had written for it. She bought the magazine and took it home. She read her husband's brilliant words—read them slowly and carefully. Her mind was acute enough to take in their full meaning, As she read her cheek grew paler and paler. With the concluding words she threw the magazine on the floor, fell on her knees, and burst into passionate weeping. “ Oh, my God ! ” she sobbed, “ don't punish me through my husband—don't, because of my sin, cast a blight on his noble nature.”

This was a direct appeal to God, prompted by sudden anguish. She made it, impelled by the sudden necessity, though she expected no answer to it. The reading, however, of the article which had caused her such pain, and in which she saw so great a change in Andrew, had the effect of bringing her heart back again to him. *She* had caused this change in her noble husband. She had

taken from him the light of love and the joy of perfect trust; from that instant her life's work lay clear before her. She must bring these good things back again to Andrew; but, though she thus resolved, she had not a gleam of light to show her the way.

After Sir Andrew's death she thought much of his words, and though she was puzzled she resolved to act on them. She determined to lead a religious life. The outward religious observances of her childhood, which she had neglected of late, recurred to her memory. She bought some books of devotion; she went on her knees morning and evening; she attended church week-days as well as Sundays; she was also charitable, and gave away much to the poor. The neighbours spoke of Lady Harvey as a very religious woman. Lady Harvey knew, or believed she knew, that not one spark of vital religion was possessed by her. Could she have guessed, as she rose from her knees, after those lifeless prayers, that even through this dry routine God was leading her not only close to Him, but into His very heart, she might have felt more comforted. But it was in the very essence of His teaching to this poor tempest-tossed soul that she must not know this just yet.

As the years went by she learned outward self-control; she also had a very keen and ever-growing happiness—this happiness lay in her child. She gave him quite enough love for half a dozen fathers and mothers combined. She had now no one else to expend the wealth of her heart's treasures upon. Her husband—a wall, transparent, thin, but hard as adamant, lay between him and her; her own people were far away.

After what her father had done, she might still love him—she did still love him—for her heart so far partook of the Divine element as to turn away from the sin, not the sinner; but the adoring, confiding love of her childhood was gone. She could now only communicate

with her people by letter, and they did not write very often.

She and little Andrew then were all in all to each other. He was a self-willed lad, proud, fiery-tempered, but he possessed his mother's affections. You could lead him by this silken cord where you would, but to coerce him by any other means was impossible. Hester read him aright, and guided him well. He would do anything for his mother. She was too wise to spoil him; her word was law to him, but then her word was so given, her precepts were so instilled, that they were also his delight. He was a shrewd boy, and he quickly perceived his father's indifference. He did not pretend to care a great deal for his father. He liked Claughtonville best when his father was away; but he was a loyal child, and when he perceived that such sentiments pained his mother, he tried to conceal them in his own little breast. He spoke and thought of his mother as jolly—very jolly—for “jolly” with little Andrew symbolised all that was delightful in life. He had some other epithet for his father, but this he did not speak.

Thus the years went by.





CHAPTER XXIV.

HESTER'S BOY.

HESTER HARVEY no longer cared for London, or London life ; nevertheless, perceiving that her husband looked ill and worried, and not liking to leave him alone, she proposed to return to town with him on the Monday after his hasty return to Claughtonville. This proposal Andrew agreed to, and, on the following Monday, the father, mother, and boy found themselves in their old quarters in Walter Street.

Town was beginning to empty fast—the weather was grilling—the elder Andrew, overworked and tired, was unusually irritable, and the younger Andrew hated London. Hester devoted herself as best she could to both, and found her task no sinecure. In the evening she entertained a few of her husband's friends, who were waiting with himself for Parliament to rise. Her mornings and days she devoted to her boy.

Little Andrew moped, little Andrew sulked and was miserable. He wanted his rabbits, his pigeons, his dog, his pony. He was as *blasé* as child could be of town ; he pined, as a healthy boy will, for the free country air. In vain Hester tried the charms of the Zoological Gardens and Madame Tussaud's. Little Andrew was too home-sick to appreciate the curiosities of either natural history or waxwork. Hester almost repented of not

having left him behind her at Claughtonville. She would have done so, but for the fear that she could not live without him.

One sultry August morning she took him with her to Regent's Park. However beautiful this park may be in spring, it was brown and dried up now with summer heat and dry weather. They wandered into the most retired part, quite away from the gardens. Hester sat down, and took out a book ; little Andrew turned head over heels, raced about, tried to believe himself at Claughtonville, failed utterly, and came, dispirited and languid, to nestle against his mother, declaring, as he did so, that there was nothing jolly anywhere.

As the child leant against his mother's knee, a man passed them slowly, a man with a long black beard and hat slouched well over his forehead. He did not appear to see them, and might have passed even without a glance in their direction, but for little Andrew's start and eager shout of—

“Hillo ! what a rum old fellow !”

This exclamation in the clear little voice caused the man to look at them. He did so, stood still, pushed his hat off his forehead, then with a muttered exclamation, which might mean anything, and certainly did mean a great deal of astonishment, came forward.

“Hester !” he said. He was Rupert Morgan.

In the bronzed, bearded, travel-stained man Hester did not immediately recognise the slender lad whom she had not seen for nearly nine years ; but love has quick intuitions ; the tone, deepened, it is true, was the old tone of long ago—the old tone with something of the old love ; her heart leaped up in answer to it. In an instant she had started to her feet, had clasped the rough hands, had kissed the cheek and brow, and Rupert sat down by her side.

“I took you by surprise,” he said.

"Yes," she answered; she was trembling all over; innumerable questions crowded to her lips. Her eyes sought her brother's.

"Were you on your way to see me, Rupert?" she asked.

"No," answered Rupert, "I can't say I was; I did not quite mean to go back to America without finding you out. I have plenty to say to you. I don't think of you as I did nine years ago; but, well! we can talk some other time; I did not mean to seek you out to-day."

The words were uttered in the old abrupt tones; but the shyness of the boy had changed into the man's rather self-confident manner.

Rupert had not looked at Hester while speaking; now he pushed back his hat and wiped his brow; he did this with a red silk pocket-handkerchief; he looked decidedly Yankee.

Little Andrew, who had been gazing at him earnestly, now came forward, laid his hand on his knee, and said—

"I shan't let my mother talk to you any more." He tossed back his proud little head as he spoke.

Rupert was about to make some suitable rejoinder to these defiant words, when the expression of the deep-set dark eyes and the whole look of the sturdy little face and figure attracted his attention; he started, and actually changed colour: the fact was, he saw himself as he was nearly twenty years ago.

"He is like you, Rupert," said Hester, who guessed what was passing in his mind; "I remember you just like my little Andrew. Andrew, this is your uncle Rupert. I have told you about him."

"Is he jolly?" asked little Andrew. "Does he like ponies and rabbits?"

Morgan laughed.

"By Jove," he said, "Hester, I never thought I'd see myself over again in your boy. I—well I must say

I'm pleased—I'm glad I've met you. Yes, I have a great deal to tell you, but perhaps not to-day."

"Tell me something to-day," asked Hester. "Tell me about my father and mother. How were they when you left them? Were they well and happy?"

"I don't know; I have not seen them for two years. Do you think I would stay near *him* after that? Of course I knew all about it. I guessed it, and taxed him with it, and he half confessed. He told me what you did—you saved him by giving him the money. 'Twas like you—'twas a shadow of the old Hetty, and spoke well for your woman's heart; but, pshaw! it was a good thing for him he went to his daughter, for no *man* would have done it."

"Oh, Rupert!" exclaimed Hester; "pray, pray don't, don't speak of that terrible day—don't think of it. Let the dead past bury its dead. Remember ~~he~~ he was our father."

"I don't think uncle Rupert jolly, mother," said little Andrew, whose eager eyes had watched both faces. "Let's come home," added the imperious child, pulling at her dress.

Morgan's attention was again attracted to his face and gesture. "Am I not jolly?" he said. "We'll see who knows most about that. I have got two ponies in America—I have got three."

"Three," echoed little Andrew; "are they black?—mine's black."

"They are large and strong," continued Morgan, and they have got long flowing manes, and they can trot and canter. They are very fine ponies indeed—they're American—no English ponies are like American."

"Perhaps they are like you," said little Andrew; "You're an American man, aren't you? Mother, come home."

"Yes, I must go, Rupert," said Hester, rising. "I—

I will write to you; give me your address. You have not told me about yourself. What are you doing?"

"I am doing well, sister," answered Morgan, "and I need no help either from you or yours. I might not even have seen you, but for the coincidence which drew us here together to-day. As things have turned out, I am not altogether sorry that we have met—no, I will give you no address, though you shall probably hear of me again; for the present farewell."

He waved his hand to her, nodded to the boy, and walked off in the opposite direction. Walking rapidly he found himself at last on the high road. He hailed an omnibus, and, mounting on its roof, drove in the direction of Highgate. Here he got down, and walked on in the comparative country of this part of London. Fields and trees were about him, and houses were less frequent. He mounted a stile, and getting into a field, stretched himself on the grass. Here, shading his eyes from the sun, he lay quiet for an hour or two. He was thinking busily. Suddenly to Rupert Morgan had appeared a strong interest in life.

Long ago he had been an ambitious boy; but alongside of his ambition had run so surly, so morose, so wild and passionate a vein, that the ambitious nature which strove upwards was ever beaten down by this other stronger nature. Young Morgan had believed that God, and the circumstances of his life, were against him; his earliest sentiments were mingled with bitterness. He had a contempt for his home, and for his father and mother, which he made no effort to conceal. Only one person had any influence over him; that person was Hester. All her brothers and sisters loved her; but none loved her as deeply or as intensely as Rupert did. Under her influence the good that was in him was kept awake, and while she was at home, he struggled in a certain manner after the right. Then there came the

change in Hester's circumstances, and Rupert's proud and sensitive spirit received just the blow it would feel most. When he believed himself to be expelled to Manchester, he grew ten times more morose and sour than ever.

Still there was something not altogether bad about him. His was a harsh and tuneless soul, but not a mean one. His very pride—for he was as proud a man as ever lived—kept him from mean and dirty actions. He would not stoop to curry favour with any one; not to save his life would he tell a lie, or even the shadow of a lie. He grew hard and disagreeable; his affections were warped, only through his pride could he be touched.

And in this way was the unhappy boy most cruelly wounded in Manchester. He found out about his father. In the larger world of London deeds and words might be hidden from his eyes which could not so escape them in Manchester. The very clerks in the office in which he worked found out about his father—learnt some of those deeds of darkness which his father did. Rupert listened and suffered—listened, suffered and grew hard.

On the night on which Morgan returned from London, after his interview with Hester, Rupert confronted him with the knowledge which he possessed: Morgan confessed and also declared that Hester had saved him.

Rupert listened to this latter fact with a mingled feeling of contempt and pleasure; he could not but partially rejoice in the knowledge that they were not all to be publicly disgraced; he believed that Hester had on the whole done the best she could for them, but any little fragment of love he had ever felt for his father was gone.

When they went to America, he separated himself altogether from his own people. He had an introduction to a firm in New York; they gave him employment, and from that moment fortune, as far as worldly prosperity

went, turned her wheel in his favour. He had talents; in his present situation these talents were brought into play.

As the years went on, he began to grow rich; he was even spoken of in New York as a rising man of business. He was by no means popular; he was still morose and disagreeable: nor was he, in any sense of the word, a happy man. He spoke and thought of himself as a failure. Money, though he made it, was not precious to him. He knew that certain fine qualities had fallen to his share, that certain talents had been his. He believed both the talents and the virtues to be dead—killed not by him, but by the circumstances of his life. Thus he was a bitter and loveless man, for in truth he loved no one in all the world.

Life had gone hard with him—that was his favourite expression; for had Hester never married Andrew Harvey, had his father never turned out a rogue and a villain, how different now might be his own surroundings! Thus he blamed his circumstances and his God—not himself. But there was one good thing left in him still; he at least knew that he was a failure; he was at least aware of the low standard which he had reached. Though remembered with bitterness and pain, the dreams of his childhood, the hopes of his early youth, were unforgotten by him.

Now, lying on the grass, after his unexpected meeting with his sister, his thoughts were revolving round and round one image; he was seeing, dancing before his eyes, other eyes as bright and dark as his used to be.

Hester's boy haunted him, almost like the ghost of his early self. His dreams unfulfilled, his hopes dashed to the ground, came over him once again; for when he had dreamt them and aspired after them, he had looked just like Hester's boy.

If anything in all the world could have stirred his

hard heart, it was this unexpected likeness between himself and little Andrew. He no longer loved Hester, but he believed himself quite capable of loving Hester's son. Already, as he thought of him, there were strange flutterings in his breast—forgotten sensations were crowding over him. He felt as he used to feel when he and Hester sat together on Sunday evenings, and talked of the good they would do when they grew up. Oh, what ailed him? His hard eyes felt quite moist. No matter how, no matter when, he must see that boy again.





CHAPTER XXV.

LITTLE ANDREW WON'T PROMISE.

HAVING made one concealment from her husband, Hester firmly resolved never to make another. Thus, on her return from Regent's Park, she told him at once of her meeting with her brother. Years ago she might have mentioned this fact with some emotion, but emotions with her now were not so easily stirred. Rupert was changed, and for the worse. She scarcely felt so much sorrow for this as she had expected she would. She told Andrew the whole story of the meeting with her brother, describing him very truthfully as he now appeared in her eyes. Andrew listened and questioned. After a pause of thought, he said—

"Do you intend to invite him here?"

"I will do what you wish, husband."

"I have no wish about it," answered Harvey. "I don't know your brother. From what you tell me, I am not likely to care for his society; but he is your brother and his presence may be agreeable to you. I am out a great deal—invite him when you please—I shall be out when he calls."

"Under those circumstances I shall not ask him to my house," answered Hester. Her husband's words had pained her much; she thought them cruel. Her

colour changed ; she walked out of the room ; she did not want Andrew to see her emotion.

Taking up pen and ink, she wrote at once to Rupert. He had indeed given her no address, but she knew a place where he would be likely to call. She determined to send her letter there. In this letter she still carried out her resolution of no concealment. She told her brother part, at least, of the truth. He and her husband were scarcely likely to agree. This being the case, she thought it better not to invite him to her house ; but she must see him. Would he himself name some place where they might meet ? She had hundreds of questions to ask him. Then she spoke of her surprise at seeing him to-day ; begged of him not to be angry with her, and assured him of her still unshaken love.

Having written this letter, she posted it at once. She was right as to Rupert's calling at the place where she had sent the letter. He did call, and received it. In the course of the next day she had an answer—Rupert would appoint a not very far distant time to meet her. He wanted to see her, and agreed with her as to the desirability of their not meeting in Walter Street ; but he did not wish to see her, or to talk to her, until he had been in London for a few days. In the meantime he made a slight request. He had taken a fancy to her boy. Might he meet the boy and his servant in Regent's Park the next morning ? He wanted to make acquaintance with the little fellow. He would take great care of him, and send him home any hour his mother might appoint. "For the sake of old times, you won't refuse this slight wish ?" concluded the proud Rupert. Hester received this letter after dinner. She showed it at once to her husband.

"I do not wish Andrew to know your brother, Hester," was his unhesitating rejoinder.

Hester did not ask why. She simply said, "Very well," and wrote to decline the appointment for her little son. She felt thoroughly unhappy; she knew that a gulf was ever widening between her and her husband; but a certain pride, perhaps a certain stubbornness, prevented her now asking for the slightest reason for his commands. In this particular instance Andrew was prepared to give her plenty, all good and wise enough; and he was much vexed by her manner. Again she wrote to her brother, telling him the truth—he and little Andrew were to be as strangers; her son must be nothing to her brother; she would try and tell him why when they met. Again, in conclusion, she begged for a speedy meeting for herself.

To this letter she received no reply. A week passed, and she began to think that Rupert, in pain and anger, had given her up utterly. Parliament had risen, and the next day she and her husband and the boy were to return to Claughtonville. On this morning, being very busy, she sent little Andrew out with her maid. He came back to his early dinner radiant and in wild spirits; he had met with an adventure; he told it eagerly, in the presence of both father and mother. "He had met that man again—that dark man who called himself his uncle; he liked him; he had come to the conclusion that he was quite a jolly man. He had walked with him and told him heaps of stories—all about America. Little Andrew would rather like to go to America himself, after what the very jolly man had said about it. Certainly the ponies in America *were* ponies; something worth having. And the man had taken him to the Zoo, and he had liked the Zoo to-day. The man had said he hoped to meet him heaps of times again, and, for his part, he was glad, for he really was a very jolly man!" The eager child rattled on unheeding his father's face of anger or his

mother's of dismay. When he left the room Andrew spoke.

"Hester, I told you my wishes about Andrew and your brother?"

"Yes," answered Hester, "and I wrote them to Rupert. The meeting must have been accidental; but I will speak to little Andrew. It must not occur again."

"It is not likely to occur again, as we go into the country to-morrow. However, you had better speak to him."

Hester went up to his nursery and called her boy to her side.

"I have a command to lay upon you, my son."

"Yes, mother," he answered, raising his clear eyes to hers.

"That man you met in the park to-day."

"He *was* jolly, mother! I made a mistake about him."

"My darling, your father and I do not wish you to know him. We have a reason for this which we cannot tell you just at present; but we would rather you did not speak to that man, should you ever meet him again."

"Why, mother? He said he was my uncle. May I not know my own uncle? Is he a bad man, mother? He does not look bad."

"No, dearest, he is not at all bad. I cannot tell you, Andrew, my real reason for putting this command upon you; I would not do it if I could help myself, for I love your uncle. Yes, Andrew, he is my dear brother."

"Does my father love him, mother?"

"He does not know him, darling."

"I do not think my father and my uncle would be very fond of each other," said little Andrew after a pause.

Hester made no answer.

Little Andrew, standing very close to her, began to stroke her cheek.

"Shall I tell you why my father and Uncle Rupert would not love each other?" continued the child. Hester was about to speak, but he put his plump little hands to her lips. "No, no!—you are going to tell me not to say, but I *will* say: they are both too proud—there!"

"Andrew," said Hester, "you must not speak in that way of either your father or uncle. You do not know your uncle at all, and you are much too young to be able to understand your father. Some day you will know what a very good and honourable man your father is. When you are older, my son, this knowledge will come to you, and you will be very glad of it."

"A good and honourable man," quoted little Andrew. "Are you good and honourable, mother?"

"I try to be, darling."

"Then why is it that good and honourable men are so hard to understand, when the nice women who are just the same are so easy? 'Tis a great puzzle to me," continued little Andrew; "and," with a heavy sigh, "I wish I was in America."

"My dear boy, would you leave your father and mother, and Claughtonville?"

"O yes, mother, I really could leave you all for a fortnight or a month; for I want to see those ponies, and to ride them. I know I shall dream about the ponies to-night, and I can't help longing for them. I suppose boys like me cannot help having great, strong wishes—wishes strong enough to drive them half wild."

"You are excited, Andrew," said his mother, noticing his flushed cheeks and brilliant eyes. "Will you get yourself dressed nicely and come down to the drawing-room? I will tell you a story."

"No, no, mother, not to-night; my head is crammed up with Uncle Rupert. Oh, he *is* so jolly!"

Hester began to stroke his dark hair softly.

"My dear, my darling!" she began, "will you try and forget Uncle Rupert? Just for mother's sake, who loves you. You are not to know your uncle, my boy. You must promise me to have nothing more to say to him."

"That's my father's wish," said little Andrew.

"It is not only your father's wish—it is mine. Do you promise?"

"No, mother, I won't promise that. I won't promise what is impossible."

He walked away quite to the other end of the long nursery, a brilliant flush on the proud, dark, angry little face.

"Then I will trust you, Andrew, without any promise," said Hester. "You have mother's commands—I trust you to obey them."





CHAPTER XXVI.

AMERICAN PONIES.

A FEW days after this adventure of little Andrew's, Sir Andrew Harvey joined his friends in their Continental tour, and Hester and her boy remained alone at Claughtonville. This had not been her husband's wish,—he had suggested at least thirty seaside places to be visited and enjoyed during his absence, but Hester loved no place like Claughtonville. She would remain there at least until Andrew's return.

They parted, with kisses and words of ordinary endearment. Outwardly they appeared a very happy married couple; no one, to see them together, would guess that any cloud had arisen in their firmament; only each felt that the innermost recess of the heart of the other was closed. Each felt it; its influence pervading all their daily lives—a hardening influence—the reverse of good. They parted, however, in outward sunshine. How were they to meet again?

Andrew went to Switzerland, and Hester settled down to her own quiet life, and to the care of her boy. Little Andrew was now eight years old, his babyhood and early childhood were already passing away. Hester knew that the time when he was altogether her own was nearly over. School-days were approaching. She

knew school-days must come, but she could not think of any parting with her son without a tightening at her heart, which was a foretaste of the pain of the real separation.

Andrew Harvey was a wild, light-hearted, enthusiastic boy, a great favourite with the old servants and retainers; his laugh was so joyous, his gay voice so full of life, that he always kept the old place awake. He had done so before his visit to London. But now there was a change in little Andrew. He did not understand in the least what was the matter; he knew that he was cross; he knew this in his heart of hearts; he said to himself over and over, that everything was just as jolly as ever, but somehow—somehow—everything did not appear so. Claughtonville was no longer perfect; the fact was, a serpent, in the form of Uncle Rupert, had appeared in the poor little lad's Paradise. When his mother told him that he must not see his uncle again, he was so indignant, he felt that the prohibition laid upon him was so unfair, so adverse to all his ideas of pleasantness, that for a whole day he could not feel quite as fond of his mother as usual. She appeared to him unjust, she had laid a command upon him he failed to understand. This state of things only lasted for a day, for his own little heart was so interwoven with his mother's, that he could not live with the shadow of a cloud between them. He was very much fascinated with his uncle; his uncle had quite charmed him, but he consoled himself with the hope that his mother would relent, and in the meantime he had the great pleasure of relating to James and John and also to his old nurse all about the American ponies. He arrived at Claughtonville, and very wonderful tales did he tell; the servants listened amazed and incredulous; little Andrew grew angry with their unbelief, he stamped his small foot, and went away to console him-

self with Rough. Rough was the English pony he himself possessed.

It occurred to him, as he stood with his arm round Rough's neck, what a small, poor kind of little animal he was; he ordered his groom to put on his saddle, and took a canter. Rough did not go half fast enough—for the first time in his life he was discontented with Rough. So it was with his other pets—his pigeons, his rabbits, even his dogs. His whole little head was full of America and its delights, for Uncle Rupert, in true Yankee fashion, had magnified the merits of the American specimens. Little Andrew was thoroughly cross, careless over his home-lessons, indifferent to his play, discontented with his home. His mother, who taught him herself, had to reprove him for his ill-completed tasks.

"I'm not well, mother," he answered in reply.

"How so, my boy?" she said. "You look very well."

"'Tis not my body, mother," continued little Andrew.

"'Tis the very, very innermost bit of me. I don't quite understand what ails it, only it feels dreadfully wrong and bad. I know, mother," he continued, "what would partly cure that bit of me that's got so sick, and what would altogether cure it. Shall I say?"

"Do, dearest; if it is a reasonable wish that mother can grant, you shall have it."

"I want to see Uncle Rupert again; I want to see *lots* of him, and to hear him talk *heaps*: that's the whole cure; and the half cure is an American pony, right away from New York."

"I will try and get you the American pony. I will write to your uncle and ask him to send for it for you; then if you are my own bright, happy Andrew when it arrives, it shall be yours. Your uncle shall get it for you, Andrew, and I am sure he will do it with pleasure;

but my little boy must trust his mother for the other thing. She loves both her brother and she loves her little son, but she would rather they did not see too much of each other for the present."

Little Andrew was silent for about a minute, then he said with a decided quiver of joy in his voice, "I know that pony will do a lot for me—I'm better already. May I run out now, mother, and learn my lesson this evening?"

His mother gave him permission, and first of all hugging her in his own ecstatic fashion, he bounded out through the open window. Hester sat down at once to write to her brother.

Meanwhile little Andrew wandered away. He was now brimful of joy and excitement; such feelings were always a little too much for him. They coursed through his blood like fire. He must race off his pleasure.

There was a field at some distance from the house, a field lately full of haycocks and all the life and motion of haymaking. He knew that now it would be deserted and quiet; he went there to give vent to some of his exuberant delight. The field was quiet; he made it noisy with his shouts and glee. Some birds in the neighbouring shrubs joined their notes to his happy young voice. At last, exhausted with running, laughing, and leaping, he threw himself on the grass. He lay quiet for a few moments, then began to count on his small, brown fingers the number of days before the American pony could arrive. He gave this much longed-for quadruped twenty days to make its appearance at Claughtonville; he pictured how Rough and his New York cousin would meet; he arranged that Tom, his own small groom, should ride Rough, while he was mounted on a superior American steed. All delights seemed centred round this American pony, for this was the goal of his present ambition. He was

absorbed in his own happy meditations when a hand was laid on his shoulder. He raised his head, the dark travel-stained face of Rupert Morgan was gazing down on this small likeness of himself. A crimson flush rushed to little Andrew's cheeks, his eyes flashed, he sprang to his feet. "Oh! Uncle Rupert, I'm to have an American pony; you are to buy it for me, and 'tis to come from New York. Have you been to mother? and has she told you about it, and then sent you on to me here, that I might describe to you just the kind of pony I like best? Oh, I say, this *is* jolly! *I am* well now."

"Mount on my shoulder, boy. Here, spring! Now what's all this about an American pony?"

"Hasn't mother told you?" asked little Andrew, laughing, for he liked his tall perch immensely.

"I haven't seen your mother yet. I don't know that I shall see her at all. I've come for you. I want you to come out with me. I've a horse and carriage just at the end of the road, and there's a fair in the village close by. You said you never saw a village fair. Come along, they are the best fun in the world."

"But haven't you seen my mother?"

"Not yet, lad; I may see her after the fair; I can't say. Here, we'll be off; there's no time to lose."

"Put me down, please," said little Andrew. His voice was quite changed; there was now not a trace of joy in it; it had a subdued, almost shocked sound. "Put me down, please," he repeated, with a little touch of dignity all his own.

Rupert Morgan threw back his head to gaze steadily into the proud, dark eyes, then, scarcely knowing why, he let the boy slide to the ground.

"What's up, young 'un? you seem to have got a fright."

"No, no," answered little Andrew; "I was only *sure* you had seen my mother, and that 'twas going to be so

jolly. Good-bye," he added, holding out his small hand.

"What do you mean, boy? Aren't you coming to the fair with me?"

"No, I mustn't; I can't. Good-bye. Please let the pony have a white star on his forehead." He turned on his heel and began to run towards the house. With a stride or two Morgan overtook him; he put his hand forcibly on his arm.

"I must know the meaning of this, my lad. I thought we were to be friends—the best of friends. I thought 'twas all arranged. Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Yes, yes, I'm glad—I'm too glad. Please let me go. Please don't keep me, Uncle Rupert."

Morgan held him still firmer.

"Answer me one question, boy. Does your mother wish you not to know me? Did she tell you not to speak to me?"

Little Andrew gave a sob, half of pleasure, half of pain.

"Yes, yes; I'm glad you've guessed. Mother loves me, and she loves you, but we are not to speak. I may have the American pony, but we are not to speak."

At these words, uttered earnestly, and with eyes raised imploringly, the darkest look that had ever passed over Rupert Morgan's face flitted with a scowl over his brow, and the blackest thought he had ever had in his heart entered it. Still keeping his hand on the boy's shoulder, he walked with him to the nearest stile. He did not speak for a few moments; when he did so his voice had its usual tone; nay, not quite its usual tone, for, for the first time in his life, Rupert Morgan used deceit.

"I see, my boy. You are a good lad to obey your mother; but I know why she did not wish you to speak to me. I will make it all right with her when we meet.

I mean to come and see her as soon as ever I've been to the fair."

A pause. Little Andrew was silent, but his face had brightened considerably. His uncle continued—

"Did you say you wanted an American pony, lad? There are two to be sold at this very fair. I saw them as I came along. Capital, good ponies, too. I am sure one would suit you. Come along and see it; we may bring it home with us this very afternoon."

"But"—said little Andrew; here he paused, his eyes danced, his brain seemed to go round. An American pony to ride that very night! An American pony to stand beside Rough in the stable that very evening! Oh, it was too much! He caught his uncle's hand; his colour came and went.

"We have no time to lose," said Uncle Rupert. "The best of the ponies, the one with the white star on his forehead, may be sold. I saw one there with a white star—just your fancy; eh, Andrew?"

"Oh, come!" said little Andrew. His mother's command was utterly forgotten; he thought of nothing but the intoxication of his present delight.





CHAPTER XXVII.

HOW THE DEVIL CAN TEMPT A MAN.

WHEN Rupert Morgan visited Claughtonville he meant no harm to Hester's boy. He called the feeling, which caused his hard heart to beat whenever he even thought of the bright handsome lad, a sudden fancy. It was a fancy, however, quite strong enough to need gratification.

Hester's letter, in which she had begged of him not to think of her little boy, not to care to know anything about him, had made him angry and indignant, though it had scarcely given him surprise. He said it was all of a piece with Hester's conduct since her marriage. Her letter, however, while it made him turn away from the writer with contempt and a desire never to see her more, but strengthened his resolve to make acquaintance with her son. He watched his opportunity, and met the little fellow in Regent's Park. Morgan had some discrimination of character, and a certain power of fascinating those whose regard he wished to win. He read little Andrew's high-spirited nature aright. He contrived to win his warm little heart, even in this first interview. He drew the boy out, and the boy managed to draw out the best of him. He parted with him after this first attempt to win his confidence, touched and softened—softened even towards Hester, for surely some

of the old Hetty he had once so dearly loved must remain in the mother of this boy.

It became a necessity for him to see little Andrew again; for this purpose he came to Claughtonville, for now with his softer thoughts of his sister, he believed it possible that he might draw her over to approve of his friendship for her son. He knew that her husband was away. He would see little Andrew first, and then visit Hester. He put up at the village inn, gave a fictitious name to the landlord, and walked away in the direction of Claughtonville. He chose fields and short cuts. In one of these fields he saw the object of his search. Little Andrew's agitation and delight touched and charmed him.

"I might be a good and great man were that boy my son," he said to his own heart.

Then came the boy's distress—avoidance of him and final confession;—his mother said they must not speak to each other!

This fact, the fact that Hester herself had poisoned her son's mind against him, darted like a sword through Morgan. All that was bad in him rose to the surface. Hitherto he had wanted the boy for good; he had regarded him as a sweet, bright angel of light. Now he would have him for evil. Hester had indeed sorely injured him. He would revenge himself on Hester by injuring her boy. No bodily harm would he do to him; but he would corrupt his moral nature. The immediate temptation lay at his very feet. The boy should break his promise and disobey his mother, and at once. He felt a savage and terrible delight in telling lies to tempt the innocent child. When he had won him over to his side, he was conscious of a new and fearful pleasure.

As they walked quickly to the fair, the child, too excited to have room for thought, prattled gaily. Morgan

encouraged him, and cast his fascination more firmly round his little heart.

There were booths and shows of all kinds at the gay village fair. There was a menagerie of wild animals; an elephant stalked about; there was a circus, and here were the ponies which Morgan had talked of as American.

Little Andrew gazed at these ponies through rose colour; their wonderful feats delighted him, and lower and lower did poor uneducated Rough fall in his estimation. His uncle pretended to negotiate for the sale of one of these ponies, and took him back into the open air. He mounted him again on his shoulder. He showed him all that the fair contained. Never in London had little Andrew seen such marvels. Finally they repaired to the village inn, where Morgan ordered dinner. Little Andrew dined with him, and felt like a king.

It was Morgan's intention, as the evening wore on, to take the boy back himself to Hester; to describe minutely their adventures; to observe the look of pain on her brow, and to part with them both for the present.

Little Andrew was flushed with pleasure and fatigue, and even yet reflection had not visited him. Morgan paid his inn bill, and, taking the boy's hand, led him back into the streets. It was now late, drunken men were about, and some foul oaths rose on the pure country air. Overhead it was very dark; some heavy drops began to fall.

"'Tis going to rain," said little Andrew.

"We will walk quickly," answered his uncle, "for a storm is brewing."

They had not gone a quarter of the distance to Cloughtonville before forked lightning overtook them, accompanied by an instantaneous roll of heavy thunder. Little Andrew felt fear, and covered his face. The



"Out again, back into the storm."

storm drew nearer, and the lightning became incessant. Walking quickly they came to a place where a great tree overshadowed half the road. At the other side stood a solitary cottage.

"Let us wait under the tree," pleaded little Andrew; but Morgan knew the danger of this, and catching the boy in his arms rushed for what he deemed the safer shelter of the cottage.

The rain was now falling in torrents. An old woman stood near the open door; they entered without ceremony, little Andrew running at once to the window. Both he and his uncle were too much absorbed with the weather to notice the look of consternation on the old woman's face.

"Eh! keep away, boy," she said, when little Andrew touched her.

"Take him to the fire and dry him," said Morgan, who noticed that his nephew's clothes were dripping.

"Eh! but I daren't; you had better be in the storm than in here. Look yon."

She pointed with her finger. A dead child lay in the corner of the room—another, with burning, flushed cheeks, moaned not far away!

"'Tis the fever! take the lad out, if you value his life!" said the old woman.

For a quarter of an instant Morgan stood still, then putting his strong arms round little Andrew, he took him out again, back into the storm. The rain fell in torrents, wetting boy and man; the man felt not one drop, nor saw another flash of the lurid lightning. He walked straight on until he reached the great avenue of Claughtonville.

The gate was opened by the gate-keeper, and, unheeding astonished looks and questions, he passed through. Little Andrew spoke to him, but he did not answer him.

On the steps of Claughtonville stood Hester. When she saw her brother and her boy she gave a scream of astonishment. The boy sprang from his uncle's arms to his mother's.

"Oh! mother! the ponies—the fair! 'twas so jolly; but I"—

For the first time in his mother's eyes the child read his own sin of disobedience. He held her hand and stood, his head drooping, a most forlorn little figure.

"I took him to the fair, Hester," said Morgan; "the devil was in me, and I did it to spite you. You told your boy we were not to speak, and the devil tempted me to lower him in your eyes. The devil tempted me, and I did this thing; but God has overtaken me. The storm came upon us, and we went for shelter into a fever-infected cottage. There may be danger—there must be danger. What will you do—not with me, but with—for him—to save his life?"

"Hush!" said Hester. As these words fell on her ears, fell also on her heart, with all their terrible meaning, she knew she was a brave woman. Not a muscle moved, her face never changed colour; she put her finger to her lips, and pointed to the wondering boy.

"My darling must have his clothes changed, and have a hot bath, and then, when he is warm in bed, mother will come up and listen to all his story," she said, addressing little Andrew, whose lips were beginning to quiver, and dark eyes to grow dim, with some oppressive sense of sin and danger. She took his hand and led him away.

As she was passing through the hall she turned round to address her brother.

"Rupert, will you wait for me in the dining-room?"

"No, no!" he answered, "I cannot pass this threshold—not after to-night."

"For the sake of old times, and because of to-night?" she asked.

For the first time there was a tremble in her voice. Rupert Morgan bowed his head and obeyed her.





CHAPTER XXVIII.

"THE BETTER LAND."

THERE is no record of the interview Hester Harvey had with her brother. It lasted for about an hour, then he went away, and Hester mounted the stairs slowly and wearily to her own chamber. When there, the woman gave way to some emotion, which showed itself in groans, and some piteous, long-drawn sighs; she shed no tears, longing for tears too much for them to come. Then she fell on her knees—the God she tried to approach daily in her routine religion must now be supplicated.

"Lord—Lord God—save—save me and mine," she pleaded. She repeated this prayer several times; but it seemed to do no good, to lead to no result, in the present or future. Oh! how terrible the empty room appeared to her! For she could see nothing of the Divine Presence, even now drawing near, with healing in His wings.

After half an hour or so she went into her boy's nursery. He had defied his old nurse, had refused to go to bed, and now, dressed in dry clothes, stood waiting for his mother. The moment he saw her he ran to her, and hid his little brown face on her breast.

"I'm not good yet, mother," he said; "I don't want to go to bed. I won't go to bed; I can't lie down to be

talked to, and explained how naughty I've been—do you hear, I'm not good yet, and I don't even want to repent."

"Andrew," said Hester.

"Ah! now there is pain in your voice, and I am putting it there. I *wish* I could be sorry, but I can't. Mother, may I come down to the drawing-room, and will you sing to me?"

"Come," said Hester very gravely, holding out her hand.

"May I choose the songs," said little Andrew, as she opened the piano. Hester gave him permission, and he made a singular and characteristic selection. First, "Ten little nigger boys"; then, "Nelly Bly"; then, "Tramp, tramp." In the first three songs he joined his own voice lustily, and with a kind of defiant ring; then suddenly his mood seemed to change, and he startled his mother by asking for "Ruby." When she sang him this song he joined in no longer, but stood quiet, his hand on her shoulder.

"Anything you like now, mother," he asked, when the sweet notes had died away. She sang "Wings" for him—he stopped her at the end of the first verse. "'The Better Land'—now, quick," he said. She sang it at once. Before it was over the boy was sobbing on her shoulder. "Oh, I *am* sorry at last," he said. "I'd rather not have had the jolly—jolly day. Mother, how sad your voice is! Are you sad because of me?"

"Yes, my boy. I am very sad because of you," answered his mother.

"Then, perhaps you won't even forgive me?"

"I have forgiven you now."

"*Have* you?" in a tone of great surprise. "Then why are you sorry?"

"I am sorry because my boy has grieved his mother

and his God ; but if he really repents, I will try to be sorry no more."

"Is repenting, feeling very bad, mother?"

"Feeling bad and determining to do the naughty thing no more."

"I *do* feel bad," said little Andrew, "and I will try to obey you always, again. I hope I won't have a terrible longing, such as I had to-day. I really *forgot* you, mother. I thought of nothing else but those ponies from America ; but I will try hard to obey you in future. Now have you forgiven me?"

"Quite—quite, my own darling."

"Does God forgive as easily as you do, mother?"

"They tell me, my boy, that God forgives more easily than any one, even than a mother does."

"Has He forgiven me?"

"Will you ask Him?"

"I'll ask Him in my prayers to-night. Now, please sing 'The Better Land' again."

That evening little Andrew added this petition to his usual prayers: "Please, God, mother says You forgive more easily than any one. Please forgive me, and keep me from wishing too much for those American ponies ; and take me to 'the Better Land' when I die. Please, God, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

After this prayer he went to sleep, peacefully as a little bird in its nest ; but his mother watched by him far into the night.





CHAPTER XXIX.

“ I HEAR THEE SPEAK OF A BETTER LAND.”

AMONGST all his companions Sir Andrew Harvey was the gayest and the most amusing : his observation was so keen, his wit so pointed, and his spirits so good, that his friends could not but rejoice in so agreeable a fellow-traveller.

This state of things continued until they reached Chamounix ; but here there came a change—scarcely noticed, indeed, by Staunton or the other men, but quite perceptible to Sir Andrew himself. The fact was, Chamounix reminded him of Hester and his wedding tour, of Hester as she was—his ideal Hester, the high-minded, high-souled woman he had believed himself to have married. Walking with his companions, talking to them, joking with them, he saw here, there, everywhere, the sweet girlish face of the Hester of old ; it troubled and haunted him both day and night ; he felt restless and unhappy, and the little foreign tour and his pleasant companions lost more and more their charm for him. Thinking of Hester as she was, gave him some softer thoughts for the present Hester ; and these thoughts expended themselves in long letters, in which he talked genially and pleasantly to her, and about their boy. These letters brought back stilted replies. The replies pained Sir Andrew ; they reminded

him too vividly of the difference between the present Hester and the Hester of old. Haunted by these reflections, he began to crave for his hard London work and to hate his holiday. Still, he felt no desire to rejoin his wife and son, for the simple reason that neither just then possessed his full heart.

For the last few years Sir Andrew had felt the gulf between him and Hester less and less; the first sore wound had grown callous; he had been hardened and injured; but neither the hardening nor the injury to his whole character brought him pain; he had passed that hopeful stage, and entered on a worse one. Had he but known it, the return of the old pain at Chamounix was a return to higher life.

I have said that neither Staunton nor the other men observed much change in Sir Andrew, but he himself had resolved to leave them and to return to England, when, one morning, a telegram was placed in his hand. These words were sent to him, not from his wife, but from the old family doctor at Claughtonville: "Your son has taken fever, and is dangerously ill. Come home at once."

Sir Andrew read the telegram once, twice; then he pressed his hand to his eyes and went into the *salon* of the hotel. Staunton was there; he called him to him, and made a few hurried explanations.

By the next train that left Chamounix Sir Andrew was on his way to England. He travelled day and night, eating little, sleeping not at all. Haunted through all these miles of weary road by one terrible vision—the vision of a little face he had never loved, of a sweet little voice which had brought to him no music, of eyes clear and beautiful which he had not cared for. Now the eyes might be closed, the gay voice silent, the restless little figure might be lying stiff, cold, and motionless. His only son, the heir to his name and title, might be dead.

Even now he might have ceased to be a father. Little Andrew might be dead—the unloved, uncared-for child, might have been taken away by God. “Poor Hester!” sighed Sir Andrew; “*she* will be broken-hearted; *she*, indeed, loved her only son. How will she live without him?” He shrank away in spirit from the pain he felt he must witness in Hester; he dreaded it, he dreaded this terrible grief which he felt he might not comfort. These were his earlier thoughts; but others, bringing greater suffering, came later. After all, would Hester’s pain be greater than his? *She* might gaze at the still, cold little face without remorse visiting her. She had never turned away with indifference from the now silent voice. She had been all that a mother could be to her boy. How different was her conduct from his! Why had he not loved little Andrew? Brave, handsome, spirited—must that one unhappy likeness chase away all these virtues? Might he not have cared for and been proud of his boy, even though he had resembled Rupert Morgan? Why, because of that unhappy likeness, must he close his heart against his own child? Ah! but Rupert Morgan, and Rupert Morgan’s people had been the cause of all the want of unity in his married life; they had brought him the greatest trouble of his existence. But for them how happy might he now be! But for them his trust in Hester would never have been shaken!

Harvey was not a man to review the past; he disliked retrospect. The present engrossed him, and he tried to live in the present. But now, on this hurried journey, with a mighty dread ever coming nearer and nearer, the past awoke its old echoes, its old pains, and self-reproach visited the proud and worldly man mightily. For the past eight years had he not been a hard husband, a cold father? Had not indifference to those nearest to him shown itself in every word and action?

Had any transgression on Hester's part, had any likeness in little Andrew's face, deserved this treatment at his hands? No. A thousand times no! Sir Andrew had still a head-belief in God, though the heart-belief was dim and nearly dead; but now, in his extremity, came some revived pulsations in the almost callous heart. He put these sensations into no words; he bent his head in no outward prayer, but yet he registered a vow—a vow which surely reached the throne on high—to be good to the little lad, if his life were spared.

In London a telegram awaited him. "The boy was still alive, but there was little hope; they feared the worst." This telegram scarcely gave to Sir Andrew the pain it might have done. Hope was not gone; the child yet lived: with this he tried to comfort himself.

At six o'clock that evening he reached the nearest station to Claughtonville. "Not dead yet—tell me no more," he said to the doctor, who had gone to meet him. He threw himself into the carriage and covered his face. Silently, almost unconsciously, as the fleet horses bore him to his own door, he was making a vow to God—

"Be good to me and I will be good to Thee."

Oh! how often has the soul appealed thus to its Maker.

As the carriage stopped at the front entrance, and he ran up the steps, he dreaded meeting Hester. He was relieved to find that for the first time since their marriage, she did not wait for him in the hall. A servant told him in what room to find his son, and he went there at once. It was evening, and some beams from the setting sun shone in at the low window of the old nursery. The man who entered the room now had seen that sun set just so, had witnessed just from the same position those many rays of light when a little child. The bed where his son lay was in shadow. The

old nurse sat by it. She raised her finger warningly to Sir Andrew—he approached the bedside without noise. He felt again a sense of relief when he saw that Hester was not here. He could bear anything now, but a certain look in Hester's eyes.

"I wish to be alone with the child," he whispered to the nurse.

She left the room wonderingly, and with some reluctance. He knew that she arrested her steps in the passage. He followed her and closed the door.

His heart was now beating fast, and his head was dizzy: all the agonies that a father can feel were awakening in his breast. He no longer made any promise to God about loving his child in the future, for he loved him in the present far too well to have room for any thought for the future.

He returned to the bedside, and for the first time compelled himself to look at the changed face of his boy. To his surprise he saw that little Andrew's eyes were wide open and fixed on him. There was neither surprise nor joy in their glance—it was simply a quiet gaze of recognition. Sir Andrew saw that the child was conscious, and bent over him.

"Are you better, my darling?"

At these words a flash of some emotion passed over the little fellow's face. He held out his wasted hand; his father's fingers closed upon it.

"Am I going to die, father?" he whispered after a pause.

"I hope not, my son. I have come home now to help to nurse and take care of you."

"But *men* can't nurse," said little Andrew with a ghost of a smile; "perhaps," he added, "Uncle Rupert could, but not *you*, father."

Harvey was silent: the little fingers still lay in his, and the weak words pierced like a sword.

"I think I'm going to die," continued the child, still in that weak, half-wandering way. "Father says he'll nurse me. I *never*! Father does not know how to nurse. Once I asked him to mend my white pigeon's leg when it got broke, and he did not know how. Poor father! he can't help being ignorant. Uncle Rupert knew all about pigeons—pigeons and ponies—ah! he is jolly."

A pause and a heavy sigh; the dark lashes closed on the white cheek, then they opened wide again.

"Mother says that angel with the beautiful face is Jesus Christ—and he's coming for me—I won't be afraid—he'll take me to the Better Land—not to India—nor America. I'd like America because of the ponies—but mother says the Better Land is the jolliest of all. Poor mother! She *will* be sorry. Father won't care—not *much*—but poor mother!"—

"I will—I do—you break my heart," said Sir Andrew, losing all self-control and leaning his head on the pillow,

The sudden passionate words restored consciousness to the weak brain.

"Why, father," said little Andrew, trying to raise himself in bed and failing, "you've come back from Switzerland?"

"Yes, my darling, I came back to you."

"But you don't love me?"

"With my whole heart—there, don't speak."

"If I die you'll be sorry too?"

"I cannot be happy without you, my boy."

"Oh! can't you?—I'm surprised!—what will mother say?—Mother!"

Sir Andrew saw that his wife was standing by his side. She bent down over her boy, kissing him many times.

"Mother, father says he loves me—he'll be sorry—

and you'll be sorry. Perhaps Jesus won't take me away to the Better Land yet. Say something to Him, dear mother."

"Yes, my son"—

"Say it quick—there, father's crying. I will"; he folded his hands: "Please, Jesus, don't take me to the Better Land just yet. It seems a pity for me to die now, Jesus, when 'tis going to be so jolly. Ah! I'm tired," continued little Andrew. His eyes closed, his hands were still folded.

In alarm his father bent forward. Hester held up one warning finger.

"Hush!" she whispered, "I think he sleeps."





CHAPTER XXX.

HER OWN PEOPLE.

HESTER was right; to the surprise of the doctor, who had little hope, to the astonishment of the mother, who had well-nigh despaired, little Andrew got better. He slept a sleep of life not of death. From this sleep he awoke conscious, recovery having set in.

For the first time, Andrew Harvey had consciously prayed to God, and consciously received a direct answer to his prayer. This fact surrounded him with a kind of awe. He had made a vow, and he must keep it. The performance of this duty arrived with no sense of hardship—love had come, making all love's burdens easy.

When little Andrew awoke, he asked for his father. Sir Andrew was there; scarcely day or night did he leave the little bed—a strong man, when he pleases, can make the tenderest of nurses; Harvey, even better than Hester, knew just the right thing to do to soothe the restless weakness which followed the severe attack. Little Andrew pronounced him quite the jolliest person in the world.

“Why, father,” he used to say, “what has come to you?”

Then, as Sir Andrew turned away in some confusion, he added—

"Ah! 'tis Switzerland, and the mountain air, I expect; they cleared lots of other things out of your heart, and left room for me;" then he would continue in an ecstatic manner—"I like you now, just awfully."

After these words, Sir Andrew felt that he was reconciled to his son; in short, that his son's heart and his had met. Little cared he now whom his boy resembled; he was his own boy—that was enough for him. His heart was touched and softened; he was greatly struck with the wonderful goodness of God.

In this frame of feeling he turned his thoughts again to Hester, and day by day with tenderer and tenderer feelings towards her. He would fain now, even more earnestly than she, break down the thin wall that lay between them. Were it possible, in any measure possible, he would restore his idol to its pedestal—the Hester of old should once more be his, and earthly life should once more be Paradise. These thoughts occupied him day and night, and he sought for an opportunity to rebuild his airy castle.

One evening he came into the library, where he saw Hester folding up a recently received letter; there were traces of tears on her cheek. Sir Andrew went up to her at once.

"Wife," he said, "what is it? You are in trouble."

He took her hand, and looked earnestly into her face; he had neither spoken nor looked at her so for many years. Hester glanced up at him, startled, almost pained at first by the reviving shock of the old tenderness.

"You are in trouble," continued Sir Andrew, who read her emotion.

"I have had a letter from Rupert," she answered; "he has gone back to America; he writes from there; my father is very ill."

"Is he dangerously ill?"

"I don't know; Rupert does not quite say what he thinks; but I should judge from the tone of his letter that he believes there is much danger."

"Let me see the letter, wife."

Hester put it into his hand. Sir Andrew read it, then let it drop to the floor. Suddenly his arms were round Hester, and his eyes looking into hers.

"God has been good to us, and has spared the boy. He means us to be happy; let us be happy. Hester, can you? will you? is it possible for us to undo the past? Will you be once again to me the Hester of the past?"

"I can never again be to you the Hester of the past," she answered; "but I can be more, ten thousand times more. This separation was breaking my heart; for even little Andrew could never take your place."

"Darling," said Sir Andrew, "answer me one question, and the wall of separation between us is broken down."

"What is that?" she said, raising her head from the shelter it had found on his breast.

"Hester, why did you break your promise to me, and why did you give your father that money? Tell me now the whole truth, and as far as my love is concerned, it shall be buried in the depth of the sea."

Hester's face, which had been rosy with renewed hope and youth, grew white—white with that livid hue which we see on the lifeless faces of the dead.

"Don't dishonour me on my dying bed," seemed to cry to her, from far over the waters, her father's voice.

"Let me enter once more into Paradise, after these long, long years of purgatory," cried passionately her own torn and bleeding heart.

She trembled from head to foot; her very nature

seemed torn in two with the strength of the temptation.

"Trust me, darling; speak—speak, even though it is hard," pleaded the voice of the Andrew of old.

"I cannot," she gasped; "never! never! If this alone must unite us, we must ever be divided."

She tore herself from his arm and left the room.





CHAPTER XXXI.

IN THE THICK DARKNESS.

HESTER went into her bedroom and locked the door. The events of late years had made her calm, had given her self-possession, had assured to her a certain portion of outward peace; but neither calm, self-possession, nor peace were her portion now. She herself had torn away her last chance of happiness.

Divided as she and Andrew were before, how much more completely now would they be severed! Life or death had been offered to her: life—radiant, rosy-coloured, joyous; death—cold, sombre, and shadowy. She had chosen death, the death of all joy for evermore. Poor wife! She had never loved her husband as she loved him now; and yet she had put away his love, she had repelled the return tide of tenderness, she had frozen the heart that could alone truly live its best life united to her own.

And why had she done this cruel thing? Because—because, whether right or wrong, she felt she must be true to the past. Her father had sinned, but she, his child, would not uncover his sin; for long years she had hidden it from all earthly eyes; gnawing as it did like a vulture her very heart, she yet had kept it concealed from all. And now, when he might be dying, should she betray him? Should she hold him

up to the scornful gaze of the one whose opinion she valued most? No, no; cost her what it might—however wrong she might have been in the first instance, she would still be true to that miserable past.

But this resolve brought her agony. Up and down her chamber she paced, with hands clenched and brows knit in despair.

“God,” she moaned, “*Thou hast been hard upon me. Long have I sought Thee ; my spirit mourned for Thee, my flesh thirsted for Thee, the living God. But I have never found Thee. I searched in the thick darkness, but Thou wert not there. I struggled to do right, but struggle as I might, all that I did seemed wrong. Oh, God ! I looked in vain for one ray of light from Thee to direct me, but it never came—never, never ! Oh, my God, hast Thou indeed forsaken me, Thy weak creature, utterly ?*”

She fell on her knees ; her tears streamed, but they were burning tears, wrung from great agony. At that moment she scarcely believed in any God, for the darkness of despair was closing round her ; still, involuntarily and helplessly, she cried to Him, moaning out through her broken sobs and groans, “My God ! my God !”

Suddenly she seemed to hear an answering voice saying to her very solemnly and sweetly, “O woman, great is thy faith.”

It was nothing but a memory, and she almost laughed at it, for she felt that she had no faith whatever. Still, it kept repeating itself, and so much so that at last she rose from her knees, dried her eyes, and went to the window. The room seemed full of these words. She went to the window to get rid of them, and looked up at the sky. It was night, a glorious autumn night, and innumerable stars dotted the deep purple of the sky. She looked up at stars and sky, and

fancied she saw spanning this purple firmament the same words, "O woman, great is thy faith."

They had this effect upon her, that at last she turned back to conscious prayer—

"God, give me faith—Christ, give me faith."

She asked this many times. The immediate effect was a great calm of spirit. In the calm following the anguish she thanked God for giving her strength to take up again her heavy burden. Then she washed her face and hands and went into her boy's room, feeling all that day and for many days to come like one who, having long been blind, saw at last dimly.

"Mother," said little Andrew as she approached his bedside, "my father has just been, and has said 'Good-night.' Tell me something, mother; something very, *very* beautiful, before I go to sleep to-night."

"What shall it be, my beloved?" she asked.

"About the Better Land, mother. Sometimes, do you know, I'm a little bit sorry that I missed going there."

"God has only put off the time, my boy; you *are* going there."

"Ah! that is nice," said little Andrew. "You and I and father—we are all going—that *is* jolly. Well, mother, sing me 'The Better Land' right through now, and I'll try and think of it all night as I sleep."





CHAPTER XXXII.

A LETTER AND ITS STORY.

THE next morning Sir Andrew told his wife that he thought of returning to London. All danger was over for the boy, and many business cares required his presence in town. He proposed that Hester and little Andrew should go to some seaside place for change, as soon as the latter was strong enough to be moved. He would come back again to take them to whatever place was most recommended by the physicians, when that time arrived. Hester agreed, and the next day Sir Andrew went up to town. Little Andrew cried and was very cross. He missed his father; he had quite changed his opinion as to a man's nursing powers, and now declared that neither his nurse nor mother knew in the least what to do for him. He begged his father not to leave him, and even went into a very naughty passion for that father's special benefit. Still, whatever his inward feelings may have been, Sir Andrew remained firm to his own resolution, and Hester said not one word to detain him. Promising to return in a fortnight, he went back to town.

In his town house, surrounded once more by his literary occupations, correcting proofs, looking through manuscripts, he breathed freely. The old hard cloak of worldliness was drawn firmly round his proud heart;

his last effort at castle-building was over. He said to himself, "Domestic happiness is a myth, which contents no one—a will-o'-the-wisp, which recedes as we venture to approach it. No woman can content a man's heart, for no woman comes up to a man's ideal. They want truth and honour—those creatures who look so fair. I am no worse off than others; all men who marry go through the same disappointments. Pshaw! I shall do very well, and—there is the boy."

The boy's image, and the boy's affection, seemed now the fairest things in the world to Sir Andrew; still they were not sufficient to fill his life. In the prime of his manhood, the love of a child alone could not suffice him. He must fill up some cravings that could not be stilled by work. He must turn to ambition, as to a solace, and a God.

London was nearly empty, but he worked all day, and tried to believe himself satisfied and happy. He had a partial success. His days passed quickly; but the long evenings and the longer nights troubled him. He was haunted, not now by the vision of the Hester of old, but by the face of the present Hester as it looked when she refused to tell him the one secret of her life.

Never had she come nearer to his very heart of hearts, than when she raised her eyes luminous with the hope of reunion to his—never, an instant later, had she seemed farther away. Far as the dead are from the living, so far had she herself divided them. He had asked what had seemed to him but a small thing; he had endeavoured to make her confidence easy; he had promised, whatever her secret, oblivion and forgiveness, and she had denied him utterly. She had said to him—oh, with what energy, and with such a look of agony!—

"If the knowledge of this secret can alone reunite us, then we must ever be divided!"

Pondering over these things evening after evening, he said to himself, "The heart I pined for is not worth the possession. What she dare not tell me, perhaps I had better not be too curious to know. Let it be so; doubtless we are best divided. I wanted the impossible; let me accept my fate with equanimity." But these resolves, according well with reason and common-sense, could not quite soothe to rest an aching pain or an unsatisfied longing.

At the end of a fortnight Sir Andrew returned to Cloughtonville, and took Hester and his little son to the southern coast for a month's change. He stayed with them for a day or two, and then returned to town. All his son's imploring words and caresses could not induce him to remain with him more than a day or two. He said that pressing business cares imperatively required his presence in London; but Hester knew, only too well, what really took him away. "The little rift within the lute" was but too surely doing its work of destruction.

When he parted from his wife, her eyes met his with such an expression of appealing pain, that for a moment he felt inclined to answer it by saying to her—

"Come to my heart, even with this secret between us—let us crush it into a grave, and never let its faintest whisper pass our lips. In spite of this impossible something which you cannot breathe to me, let us be true husband and true wife again."

But even with the longing thought, which prompted reunion, came a second which said to him, "The secret you try to bury is not dead. Like a snake in the grass, it will start up and sting you again and again."

He kissed his wife with no special outward warmth; but her face of mute suffering haunted him. He went up to London to work harder than ever, but work as he would, thoughts crowded upon him, desires for what he

deemed the impossible grew stronger and stronger. Finally he had to acknowledge to himself, that at the age of five-and-thirty he was a soured, disappointed, and unhappy man. He had wealth, he had talent, he had great bodily strength—life's good things surrounded him, and life's richest blessings seemed to be his; but what the poorest and humblest may possess he had not got, and in consequence his heart's heart, the very life of his life, all that was noble and divine within him, was bleeding itself to death. He had too much of the elements of greatness in his nature not to recognise this moral decay. He recognised it, but he saw no remedy. His wife's soul being indeed the loftier of the two, could stretch out longing hands directly to the Divine, could thirst for the living God, believing that having once found Him she should have found also the fulness of life, but the Divine could only come to him through, and in the heart of, the woman he loved.

One day, about a fortnight after his second return to town, Sir Andrew, after a rather bad night, was seated at his breakfast-table; he was sipping some coffee and looking over the morning papers, which lay in a pile near his plate, when he saw a hansom cab draw up suddenly at his door.

"I am not at home to visitors," he said to the servant, who happened to be in the room. Then he buried himself once more in one of the *Times* leading articles. In a moment he was disturbed; the servant presented him with a card on a silver salver.

"The gentleman thinks you will see him, sir; he says his business is very pressing."

Sir Andrew took up the card, gave a start of annoyance and dismay, hesitated, then desired the servant to show the gentleman into his study.

The card bore on its plain white surface the disagreeable name of "Mr. Rupert Morgan."

The very name seemed to rub Sir Andrew the wrong way; all the real pain at his heart with regard to Hester, all the many discomforts and disagreeables which had come since his marriage, were connected with the name of the visitor who now awaited him. Through this very man he had all but lost his only son. Should he, even now, refuse to see him? No; that would be unwise. If he refused him the interview he coveted he would go to Hester—perhaps annoy Hester, and injure their boy again.

He rose, and went with his haughtiest step into his study. He did not offer to shake hands with Morgan; he simply wished him good morning, and then said in curt tones that he had five minutes to place at his disposal. Would five minutes suffice for what he wanted to speak to him about?

"Two minutes will suffice," said Rupert Morgan. "I have to ask you a question, to tell you a piece of news, and to give you something which belongs to you."

Sir Andrew bowed.

"I will ask my question first," continued Morgan, "for I cannot bear suspense, and its answer will at least give to me certainty." As he spoke he came close to Sir Andrew.

"You know, or do you know the injury I tried to do your boy? I will say nothing here of my motives; I will acknowledge that they were bad, but further than that bare acknowledgment, I will refuse to discuss them with you. Your boy was perfect, I meant to take the bloom off the flower—I did not mean to lead him into physical danger, and yet I led him into it. Did he—speak?—did he suffer through my sin?"

"Through your sin he suffered—almost to the extent of life," answered Sir Andrew.

"Good God! I have not killed him?"

"He is alive. So far, your plan failed. God has been good enough to spare his life."

"Ah! God is good. I can thank Him now, for I love the boy. Had he died, I could never have known another happy moment."

Sir Andrew turned away impatiently.

"I thank you," continued Morgan. "However unwillingly, you have relieved my worst fears. I will venture to ask you a second question. How is my sister?"

"My wife is well."

"And happy?"

"That is nothing to you, sir."

Here Sir Andrew, whose tones were of the coldest and haughtiest, took out his watch. Whatever his feelings, he would not lower himself by showing any outward annoyance, but his manner was exasperating to the last degree.

Morgan's dark face flushed wrathfully.

"We will see if it is nothing to me," he answered. "However, for the present, we will let that pass. I said I had three things to do in this house. I have done the first, I now proceed to do the second. I have a piece of news to convey to you; this is my news. Your wife's father and my father—a man who was little respected, who did much harm in the world—is dead. I was with him when he died. I was with him; and though I think little of death-bed repentance, and though, irreligious man that I am, I believe that sin once done must necessarily bring its own punishment; yet still, to a certain extent, I believe in reparation. My father committed many sins. I, his son, am not the one to speak of them to you, proud man, who set yourself up as a god, and despised him and us. But one sin, the greatest and blackest sin of his life, he sinned against you and yours—against you and the

noble woman whom you are so unworthy to call your wife. She never said it, but I know what her life has been from the moment my father committed this sin. She, for his sake, would never have opened your eyes, but in so far he can at least repair the mighty evil he has done. Here is his written confession—written and directed to you; he wrote it in my presence. I have witnessed it. Will you read it now?"

"Lay it down," said Sir Andrew. His face was white; his haughty manner was gone; he was a man speaking to another man.

"Lay it down; leave me," he said; but his voice was no longer proud, it was broken with pain.

Morgan laid a thick packet on the table, bowed, and withdrew.

When he was gone; when, indeed, he was out of the house, Sir Andrew rang the study bell. To the servant who answered the summons he said—

"I shall be engaged for the next hour; whoever calls, I can see no one; you understand, I am not to be disturbed for an hour."

Then he locked the door, drew a chair to the table, and took up the sealed packet which Morgan had left there. He broke the black seals and spread the sheet of paper before him. These were the words, written in the weak caligraphy of the very ill, which he read:—

SIR,—I am a dying man. I am urged to write to you by my son Rupert. My son is with me, and will remain with me until I die. He has promised to put this written confession of mine into your hands himself. Sir, my son has just returned from England; he has seen my daughter Hester; he tells me she is changed: though she never said so, he believes her to be unhappy; he thinks, whether with reason or not, that you and she do not care for each other as much as you once did. No doubt, sir, when you married my daughter you thought, and your friends thought, that you had given her a great rise in the world—we all saw how you looked down on us, but we tried not to mind, for we believed in your love for our Hester. Sir Andrew

Harvey, when you married our Hester, you raised yourself as no title and no money could ever have raised you. She was unlike me, she was unlike her mother, she was unlike her brothers and sisters; she was, even from her earliest years, most noble. I say this much, sir, to relieve a father's feelings.

Now, I have something to tell you. You once gave her a command, you believed that she disobeyed this command. I will tell you the true story.

In the year —, in the month of August, I wrote to my child, and asked her to lend me one hundred pounds. In reply to this letter she sent me a message from you—I should have the money if I explained to your satisfaction what I wanted the money for. This was impossible. I came up to London by the next train, and saw my child Hester. I begged for the money—and at once. You know, sir, something of the love she had for me and for her own people. With this love shining in her eyes—for she believed me, villain that I am, perfect—she yet refused to lend me the money. I was in despair, for my need indeed was great. There was nothing for it but to tell my child what I wanted the money for. I did tell her. I now tell you, sir. I had gambled, and lost heavily. In an evil moment I stole one hundred pounds from my employers, meaning to win double that sum at play, and so replace it. Of course my luck was against me—I lost all. I had not a penny in the world, except the few shillings I had borrowed from a friend to come to town. If the hundred pounds were not replaced by the next morning, the theft would be discovered, and I should be in prison, ruined indeed for life. From this awful fate, I begged my child to save me. You, who know her character, may judge of her agony, and yet she refused. She had promised you—she could not break her promise. I told her there was no time to go to you, that I must return to Manchester by the next train. She looked and seemed nearly wild with agony and perplexity. She said, at last, that she must go away for five minutes—she must have that time to think alone. When she was gone, I felt indeed in despair. I saw by the very look in her eyes that she would be true to you, that her love for you, and for what was right, was greater than her love for me. A key was in your private secretary—I opened it. A pocket-book lay within, containing notes. I took away notes to the value of one hundred pounds. I wrote a letter to my child, telling her what I had done, and begging of her to save me from all the evil consequences of my own act, by making you believe that she had given me the money. Then, before she had time to return, I stole, like the thief I was, out of the house. By the next morning's post I had a letter from my Hester—she would do my bidding—she would save us all.

This, sir, is my story. You would never have heard it from Hester's lips, now ; so I, her dying father, tell it to you. If you are in any degree worthy of her, you will forgive what you may still call her sin, and will honour her faithful and noble heart.

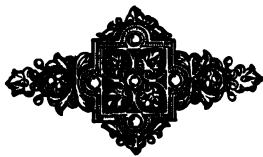
Sir, I am utterly unfit to be my child's father ; but I do not write here to trouble you about myself. I have sent to Hester some messages through her brother. If I may venture to make a request of you, it is to ask that she and her brother may meet, so that my last messages may be given to her.—I am, sir, the very unhappy father of your noble wife,

JOHN MORGAN.

Sir Andrew read this letter very carefully twice. During neither of these careful readings did a single exclamation pass his lips.

At the end of the second reading, his eye rested on Rupert Morgan's card, which he had brought with him into the study. The name of the hotel where Morgan was staying was written in pencil on the card. When Sir Andrew perceived this, two words did pass his lips. He put on his hat and went out at once. The words were—

"Thank God !"





CHAPTER XXXIII.

BY THE SEA.

AT the seaside, little Andrew quickly recovered his health and strength. The weather was that lovely autumn weather which comes now and then in October. Summer sounds still lingered in the air, and summer beauty still dwelt in the landscape and tipped the waves; only the falling leaves spoke of winter, but falling in loveliest colours to the ground, they showed none of winter's ugliness, and but added to the universal beauty. Hester and little Andrew were out from morning to night. She used to sit on the seashore, while he occupied himself in many ways; the little eager feet were never still, the active little brain was full of projects. Like all enthusiastic children he threw his whole heart into whatever most interested him. The sea was his present passion; its waves, its shore, its rocks, its shoals, kept hands, feet, and brain busy all day long.

"Oh! that Claughtonville were near the sea; no inland place could be like a seaside place." Such were the exclamations ever on his tongue.

One day it so happened that Hester went out without him; he had wearied the fast-returning strength, and after his early dinner she made him lie down, promising to return for him in an hour or two. She put on her

own outdoor apparel and went at once to the beach. She had an unaccountable desire, a feeling which amounted to almost pain, prompting her to walk fast and far. The sea was at its lowest ebb, the beach firm and hard. She saw in the far distance a little cove gleaming bright and yellow in the sunset. She resolved to reach this cove; the tide had never permitted her to do so before—indeed she had never noticed it until now; but its distance and the gleaming light on its space tempted her, and she walked fast in its direction. It was a treacherous little cove, much farther off than it looked, and even at low tide rather difficult of access from the beach. Even now, as she approached the last low rocks which divided her from it, the waves were beginning to lap them in a return embrace. She ventured on, however, and found, when she at last reached her little haven, that there was plenty of egress on the other side. Her walk had tired her, and she sat down in the sunshiny little place to rest. Rest of body, however, was not rest of mind. The thoughts, which even little Andrew could not disperse, thronged quickly. "I will not dwell on them," she said, driving back with a resolute will this host of evil memories.

Hester Harvey had now gone through some of the deep waters of life; the effect of this hard battling with storms and billows was bringing the little bark of her life far more quickly than smooth seas would have done to its desired haven. The unsatisfied heart, the great wealth of love, the high-toned, high-souled nature, had looked afar, to east, to west—on the right hand and on the left, and had found no comfort. What was there left to her now, but an upward glance? She had indeed sought for God in the depths and found Him not; but might He not be coming down to her from above, coming down with light and hope to reveal to her Himself? Since that night of agony, when she had

seemed to see those strange words spanning the heavens, the birth of her faith had begun. When she knelt to pray, those words had returned to her, had filled her with a strange hope. With the birth of faith came also the birth of love. The tempest-tossed human heart was turning to the Divine Heart, the Divine Heart was opening wide to receive it. Sitting on the sea-shore she pressed back sorrowful thoughts, then she took out a small pocket Testament which she carried about with her, for she felt that a word or two direct from the God-man Himself would still the pulsations of pain, which might not otherwise be quieted. She read the seventeenth chapter of St. John over twice. The sublime words of Christ were coming into her soul with power. She bowed her head on her hands.

"Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am." These words were vibrating through and through her heart and head. She had a kind of vision of the time when those whom the Father had given to the Son should be reunited, made one through and in Him, and this vision, which she saw with the eye of faith, included her husband and her child. She felt strong and able to bear all that earth might bring to her. She now rose to return home. She had sat for about half an hour on the little beach, and knew that there was no chance of her being able to return by the way by which she had come, but she went with confidence towards the other opening which had lain before her, broad and bare, when she entered the cove. She was surprised to see what rapid advance the waves had made, but there was still a narrow belt of dry sand; she stepped along it, expecting to find broad open coast beyond; she found herself, however, only in another cove, smaller than the one she had first entered, and this cove was already completely sea-locked. She was a woman with plenty of physical courage, but she

also possessed clear insight: it did not take her an instant to recognise her danger. She saw that these little coves lay far, far below high-water mark. Unless she could scale the cliffs, or unless some one could come to her aid with a boat, she must certainly be drowned. She saw that the cliffs hanging over the smaller cove were altogether impracticable; she ran quickly back into her first resting-place, wetting her feet as she did so with the salt waves. Here affairs looked no better; a man might possibly scale the slippery surface of the rocks, but no woman could attempt such a feat. Her only hope, then, lay in rescue from without. She looked around the vast expanse of water, not a sail was in sight; in this little distant cove she was far away from all the habitations of men. She tried shouting; she raised her clear voice to its highest notes, but the wind and waves seemed to mock and drown her efforts. At last she sat down quietly in her former resting-place. There was nothing left for her to do but to calculate how long the water would take in reaching her; she took out her watch, and, marking its progress, believed that she might have about an hour and a half to live.





CHAPTER XXXIV.

WAVES THAT BEAT ON THE BETTER LAND.

IN about an hour and a half little Andrew awoke from his sleep. He was now quite refreshed, and eager to return to his play on the shore. His servant offered to go out with him, but he said he would wait for his mother; he stood at the window watching eagerly for her return. He saw no sign of her, but was much diverted by the sight of a carriage which drove up rapidly and stopped at the door. Two men got out. Little Andrew raised a high and gleeful shout; he recognised his father—and—and Uncle Rupert.

"Oh! both of you," he panted; "both of you together—'tis *too* jolly!"

From his father's arms he managed to climb to his uncle Rupert's shoulders. He was far too eager and excited to be capable of answering any questions. From the servant, however, Sir Andrew learned that his wife had gone for a walk on the beach. He said he would follow her and bring her home, and he left his son, notwithstanding, to the many fascinations of Uncle Rupert.

He had a small telescope in his pocket. Having reached the beach, he took it out and looked around him. The tide was coming quickly in; the evening shadows were falling. All along the low sea-line he saw not a soul in sight. He believed that Hester, having gone a

long way, must be coming home by the cliffs. He walked quickly, his heart beating fast. He was not only agitated now by the thousand thoughts which had crowded upon him since yesterday, but he was also oppressed by an undefined sense of uneasiness; a nameless something urged him forward. He coasted very near the edge of the cliffs, looking anxiously for his wife's approaching figure. Having walked for about a mile he suddenly stood still—he fancied he heard something, something faint and low, but still something altogether different from the splashing and murmuring of the restless waves. He stood still listening intently. He was now sure of the sound which reached him. It was the low voice of a woman, singing to a well-known chant well-known words.

Abide with me,
In life or death, O Lord,
Abide with me,

reached him, from this woman's voice.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. He felt as though a dreadful hand was pressing round his heart; an awful fear made him turn cold and even sick. He fell on his face and hands, and crept to the edge of the cliff. Looking down he saw a woman—the woman in all the world to him. She was sitting on a rock, the waves about two feet away from her feet. Sir Andrew was too horrified to make even an exclamation, but instantly, almost like a flash, he had thrown himself over the cliff, caught on to some brambles, and briers, and projecting pieces of rock, and was by her side.

"Come, Hester, come at once," he said; "put your arms round my neck, and I will get you out of this. Oh! good God! how nearly you were lost."

The words had scarcely passed his lips before some soft red earth which had clung to a rock about three

feet above their heads, and in which a little tree was growing, loosened by Sir Andrew's descent, fell with a soft thud into the water. The cliff was now altogether impassable; towering and perpendicular, it rose above their heads.

"You *are* lost," said Sir Andrew; "*we* are lost. Oh! why is this? Oh, my God!"

"You can swim, husband," said Hester, looking at him with an expression in her eyes which nerves strung to their highest tension alone can give. "You can swim and your life must not be lost. Put your arms round me, just for a moment. Just once say to me, 'My wife, I forgive you all the past,' and then go—go, my beloved. I shall die quite happy then."

"I will fold you in my arms—so," said Sir Andrew; "and when you die you shall die—so; for I am never going away from you again. If you die now, so will I."

"No, dear," said Hester, "that would be wrong. Your life can be spared, for you are a strong man and a brave swimmer. God does not mean you to throw away your life thus; you must go for my sake, and for our boy's sake. You must live for our boy's sake, Andrew—for the sake of our only son; you must not throw away your life. Go, go at once—the waves are getting more and more angry—go at once, for the sake of our son."

She almost pushed him from her, but he held her fast.

"You are dearer to me than ten sons. There are a few moments left before the water can reach us. Lay your head on my breast, Hester, and listen; I have news to tell you."

Something in his words made her tremble; something in his words brought back a great, strong, earthly hope.

"Speak," she said.

"Hester, your father is dead."

"Dead?—ah!"

"Yes, Hester, he is dead. On his dying-bed he wrote to me a long letter all about you. What you, for his sake, concealed, he confessed. Ah! my darling—my poor darling, I was hard on you. I failed to understand you. Beloved, we both made a mistake, for you might have trusted me."

"What is that?" said Hester, cowering and shrinking closer to her husband with a sudden movement of physical terror.

"Only a wave, love, that wet your feet—never mind, I am with you."

"No, no, no," she sobbed, "I will not let fear overcome me. Go, Andrew; go for the sake of the Hester of old. Oh, how happily I shall die now! Oh, Andrew, how beautiful God looks to me now—He has filled my soul with such joy!"

"Wife, we are one again. Kiss me," said Sir Andrew.

As their eyes met, and their lips pressed together in a fulness of union which nothing but strong suffering could have brought to them, Sir Andrew suddenly started, his ear had detected the splash of an oar.

"We may be saved, both of us!" he exclaimed.

"Let me shout; help me, Hester."

They both shouted loud and clear. Above the waves the man's and the woman's voices mingled, and the fishermen who heard them, and who came to their rescue, said they never listened to sounds more free from fear in the immediate prospect of death.

Thus they were saved.

* * * * *

"Mother," said little Andrew that night, "do you know that all sorts of jolly things have happened?"

"What are they, my son?"

"Well, first, there's a real live American pony waiting

for me in London. Uncle Rupert brought the pony over, straight from New York—isn't it jolly?"

"Yes, my dear boy."

"And next, mother, do you know, I really think that my father and Uncle Rupert are going to love each other very much."

"Thank God!" said Hester.

"Mother, are you going away? Stoop down, I want to whisper to you. You have such a funny look in your face, and father has such a funny look in his face, and—and, 'tis so jolly altogether, that I think it must be a little bit like 'the Better Land'; is it, mother?"

"Yes," answered Hester—and she was right. For is not love heaven? and is not the union of hearts a foretaste of the eternal union with God by-and-by?







